ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "IN MY EXPERIENCE…":
AN EXPLORATION OF HOW RURAL, BLACK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' K-12 EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE THEIR DECISIONS TO PURSUE OR NOT PURSUE TEACHING AS A CAREER

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Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership

There was a time in the US when Black youth revered their Black teachers and looked to them as models of excellence (Foster, 1997). In fact, during the 1950's, nearly half of all Black professionals were teachers who taught Black students in segregated schools (Cole, 1986). However, following the *Brown* decision, thousands of Black teachers were dismissed (Fenwick, 2022) and racist teacher licensure testing was implemented to ensure otherwise qualified Black teachers would not be hired at recently integrated schools (Fenwick, 2021). Since then, Black students have been educated by an overwhelmingly white teacher workforce. Currently in the US, only 2% of K-12 public school teachers are Black men and only 5% are Black women (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Although extant research explores barriers for Black pre-service students' teacher preparation program completion (Walker, 2020; Dinkins & Thomas, 2016), and factors influencing Black in-service teachers' turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; D'amico et al., 2017), few studies seek to understand why most Black high school students never choose to pursue teaching as a viable career in the first place. As we attempt to remedy the systemic failures in US educational policy and practice, and repair the

broken Black teacher pipeline, it is important to understand why Black high school students do or do not choose to teach.

Drawing on Lortie's (1975/2020) notion of teaching as an apprenticeship of observation, this study sought to illuminate what Black, rural, high school students observed during their K-12 schooling, and how those observations influenced their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career. Utilizing Critical Race Theory and Black Critical Theory, this study drew attention to the ways systemic racism and anti-Blackness influenced their decision-making processes as they navigated racially heterogenous rural schools with mostly white teachers and administrators. Using qualitative study methods, including individual and focus group interviews, all six participants shared stories that detailed their experiences in schools and how those experiences influenced their perceptions of teachers and teaching. The research questions guiding this study were (1) How do the K-12 experiences of rural, Black high school juniors and seniors influence their decisions to pursue or not pursue K-12 teaching as a career path? (1a.) How do they describe their own schooling experiences, particularly as related to interactions with teachers, curriculum and instruction, and discipline? (1b.) How do they describe and perceive the impact of race and racism on their schooling experiences and how do those perceptions impact their view of the teaching profession? (1c.) In what ways do their prior schooling experiences and conceptualizations of teaching and teachers influence their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching? (2) How can study participants' experiences and understandings inform strategies for increasing the number of Black high school students who pursue K-12 teaching as a viable career path?

My findings highlighted the implications of being a Black student in a predominantly white and rural region, participants witnessed and experienced psychological harm in schools,

their perceptions of the teaching profession, Black students' attractors to and deterrents from teaching, and participants proposed solutions for increasing the viability of teaching for Black high school students. Overall, the study found that as Black students are deciding whether or not teaching is a viable career option, positive student-teacher relationships are crucial, teachers' job satisfaction matters, and high school teacher preparation programs make a difference. The findings provide insight into the ways Black high school students' experiences in schools influence their perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession, and how those perceptions influence their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career.

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2025

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2025

Dedication

For Aunt Kay, Aunt Betty, Aunt Annie, and my mom, Loren;

Thank you for teaching me why Black teachers are so important.

I love you.

Acknowledgements

To **my family**- I have followed your examples of what it means to love and serve. Thank you for pouring into me, for supporting me, for holiday meals, for cookouts, for game nights, and for making sure I never forget where I came from. To **my grandparents,** Pat and Johnie- You are my backbone. You have taught me so much about life. You are the most dependable people I know. I would not be here without you. Thank you for always having my back. To **my mom,** Loren- Your support has meant everything to me. Thank you for loving me so well. Thank you for always letting me be me. You give me the confidence I need to move through the world. I am who I am BECAUSE of you. I love you always, no matter what.

To my **2020 cohort**- Brent, Manny, Shaneequa, Amber, Crystal- I did not come into this program looking for lifelong friends, but alas, here we are. I am so thankful I was on this journey with you. We are locked in. I love y'all. To my **"MUE" OGs**- Blake, Alexis, Courtney and Nardos- Your words and insights always encourage me. Thank you for always reminding me who tf I am. To **my committee members**, Dr. Zamora Liu, Dr. Allen, Dr. Turner, and Dr. Liu- Thank you for investing your time, not just into this project, but into making me a more confident scholar. To **my advisor,** Dr. Tara Brown- Thank you for believing in me, trusting me, challenging me, and encouraging me. Thank you for being the best leader I could ever imagine.

To **my community**- WE DID IT! This really was a group effort. To everyone who poured into me with texts, polos, Venmo, food, cards, care packages, concert tickets, basketball, hugs, advice, and love- I truly could not have done this without you. Thank you.

And to **my participants**- Thank you for trusting me with your stories. Live your dreams.

The world won't get no better, if we just let it be
The world won't get no better…
We gotta change it, yeah, just you and me
-Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, 1975

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The racial demographics of the teaching workforce are alarmingly inconsistent with the demographics of the P-12 student population in the US (Hussar et al., 2020). Currently, the student population, 54% of whom are from racially minoritized groups, is becoming more racially diverse every year but being educated by a teacher workforce that is 80% white, and becoming whiter every year, with no indication of a change in trajectory (Hussar et al., 2020; Collier, 2002). More specifically, Black students comprise 15% of the P-12 student population and are often in schools that have a majority minority population (Hussar et al., 2020), whereas only 2% of educators are Black men and only 5% of educators are Black women (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). This sobering reality implies, although students have approximately 40 teachers during their P-12 schooling, most will only be educated by one or two Black teachers.

These demographic realities have a wide impact on students and schools. Due to school systems' inability to recruit and retain Black teachers, many Black students must navigate their everyday school environments without much guidance from Black adults. For white students and non-Black students of color, the paucity of Black teachers increases the likelihood they will spend their formative years without the opportunity to learn from or submit to a direct authority figure who is Black. The lack of Black teachers also implies that most white teachers will never learn from or grow with a co-worker who is Black. In the broader school context, their absence indicates Black teachers are not on school improvement committees, participating in faculty meetings, contributing to common planning sessions, nor providing input regarding school-wide decisions that affect all students.

The presence of Black teachers in P-12 education has proven to be beneficial for students, parents, and communities. Historically, Black teachers have been lauded for their ability to contrast the messages students receive from society, broadly, and instill hope and possibility in their Black students through education (Siddle Walker, 1996). Recent research shows Black teachers have a positive effect on both student behavior and academic achievement (King, 1993; Capers, 2019; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Dee, 2004; Easton-Brooks & Eddy, 2009; Egalite et al., 2015). For example, high expectations and culturally sustaining pedagogy are effective teaching strategies often used intuitively by Black teachers (Brown, 2011, 2012; Milner, 2012b; Pang & Gibson, 2001; Philip, 2011). However, the positive impact of Black teachers goes beyond their relationships with students in the classroom. Black teachers are also uniquely positioned to act as cultural brokers for Black students and families navigating the school system and the wider community (Markowitz et al., 2020; Vinopal, 2018). Black teachers who draw from critical reflections on their experiences, beliefs, and values have the potential to challenge the status quo in public schools by providing more equitable learning experiences that implore non-Black teachers to reimagine educational possibilities for Black students.

Study Purpose

As practitioners, researchers, and policy makers consider the urgency to increase the P-12 teacher workforce, broadly, special attention must be given to increasing the number of Black teachers, specifically. Multiple states and their respective institutions are developing recruitment strategies to attract more Black students into teacher preparation programs (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Fielder, 1996; Jean-Marie Pabon et al., 2011; Tyler et al., 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Despite these efforts, the proportion of Black secondary students who choose education as a career path is still insufficient to meet the needs of the Black student

population (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Cole, 1986; Graham, 1987). To effectively allocate funds and energy toward the recruitment of Black students into the field of education, it would be wise for stakeholders to consider the reasons Black students have or have not considered teaching as a viable career path.

Unlike any other profession, students are introduced to teaching through an apprenticeship of observation nearly every day of their lives beginning the moment they enter school (Lortie, 2020). Stakeholders will find, however, that extant literature exploring individuals' reasons for choosing teaching as a career path often centers white students without considering the unique experiences of Black students (e.g., Lortie, 2020; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Watt et al., 2012). Black students in the US navigate the school system with different circumstances, concerns, and often in very different environments than most white students. Therefore, as we seek to increase the number of Black students who choose teaching as a career path, it is important to explore how these students perceive their experiences in the public school system and how those experiences have shaped their views of the teaching profession. In doing so, researchers must rely on the perspectives of Black students to develop best practices for recruitment, and they must do so without the underpinnings of white norms.

Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of Black students' perspectives, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do the K-12 experiences of rural, Black high school juniors and seniors influence their decisions to pursue or not pursue K-12 teaching as a career path?
    a. How do they describe their own schooling experiences, particularly as related to interactions with teachers, curriculum and instruction, and discipline?

   b. How do they describe and perceive the impact of race and racism on their schooling experiences and how do those perceptions impact their view of the teaching profession?
   c. In what ways do their prior schooling experiences and conceptualizations of teaching and teachers influence their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching?
2. How can study participants' experiences and understandings inform strategies for increasing the number of Black high school students who pursue K-12 teaching as a viable career path?

Overview

This paper will consist of six more chapters. I begin with a review of current literature that addresses the Black teacher pipeline, including benefits of increasing the number of Black K-12 teachers, reasons for the Black teacher shortage, and a review of empirical data on Black high school and college students' perceptions of teaching. The following chapter explains the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guided this study. Next, I include a detailed explanation of the methods I used to complete this study, including data collection and analysis. After that, I use two chapters to explain the five major findings from this study. I conclude with a discussion of this study within the context of previous literature and the implications of this study for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will discuss the reasons stakeholders should give attention to the lack of Black teachers in the workforce, beginning with: (1) Black teachers' positive impact within P-12 schools and their communities, (2) the historic and contemporary trends related to Black teachers' recruitment and retention in P-12 education, and (3) an exploration of the role of multiple teacher preparation programs in preparing Black teachers for a career in P-12 education. The next section will consider the methodologies and conclusions drawn from current research literature that explores the reasons Black P-12 students do or do not want to pursue teaching as a career path. Finally, I will provide implications for researchers who seek to increase the number of Black students who pursue teaching as a career.

Why Black teachers?

> *"To operate a public school system without black teachers is to teach white supremacy without saying a word."* (Mercer & Mercer, 1986)

This section will explore the positive impact Black teachers have on the entire school environment, including students, colleagues, curriculum, and policies, drawing attention to both passive and active teacher effects (Dee, 2004). I will explain the ways Black teachers act as organic intellectuals who practice liberatory education, contribute to improved academic and behavioral outcomes, and provide colleagues with divergent ideas and perspectives that can positively change the school community.

Beyond Role Models

Public discourse often positions Black teachers as role models (Brown et al., 2018). This positioning reduces the need for Black teachers to the notion that their primary role in schools is to be a tangible example of "professionalism" to which Black students should seek to aspire, thereby oversimplifying their potential impact in schools. Irvine (1989) makes a distinction

between role model and mentor, suggesting Black students would benefit more from mentors who advocate for their best interests, teach them how to navigate the school's culture, and "serve as the voice for black students when communicating with fellow teachers and administrators" (p. 53). As mentors, Black teachers are more than proximal examples of "success." By attending to students' social and emotional needs, they are an active participant in students' survival and pursuit of their goals (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019).

Rezai-Rashti & Martino (2010) posit that a focus on teachers as role models distracts from "how the organization of school knowledge, curriculum, and broader structural influences affect minority students' engagement with schooling" (p. 42). They suggest, along with Dimitriadis & Carlson (2003), that Black teachers can serve as "organic intellectuals," emerging from the Black community with the unique ability to engage in "both critique and re-presentation, deconstructing the hegemonic 'common sense' that keeps them oppressed and constructing a counterhegemonic voice as part of a project of empowerment" (p. 42). They emphasize that Black teachers, as organic intellectuals, can "write new histories and provide new interpretations of social problems, and they recover the stories of those whose voices have been silenced" (p. 42). The public discourse must move beyond the simplistic narrative of Black teachers as role models who Black students should seek to emulate and toward the ways Black teachers draw on their intersectional identities, knowledge, experiences, worldviews, values, and beliefs, as they engage in the pursuit of equitable education for all students.

Black Teaching Matters

Black teachers who draw from their own experiences and employ a pedagogy responsive to the lived experiences of Black students can equip them to challenge the status quo and create change in their communities. Brockenbrough (2018) states, "Black teachers are credited for

developing culturally responsive pedagogies that allow them to effectively engage Black students" (p. 7). bell hooks (1994) explains that for Black folks, "teaching— educating —was fundamentally political because it was rooted in anti-racist struggle" (p. 2). Black teachers often enter the field of education to both provide a space of freedom and liberation for Black students within oppressive educational spaces and bring about social change (Brown, 2011; Duncan, 2020; Lynn et al., 1999; Milner, 2012b; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). When Black teachers practice teaching toward liberation for Black individuals, they challenge commonly accepted epistemologies and curricula that uphold white supremacy, colonialism, racism, and other "-isms" that stand in the way of freedom for systematically oppressed people. Although these curricula and pedagogical practices do not free Black students from oppression, they are a tool used to move toward more just futures for Black students amidst systemic racism and anti-Blackness.

Black teachers who teach toward more just futures provide unique insights for Black and non-Black students as they prepare to become active citizens in a multicultural society. Black teachers understand the importance of assisting all students in "recognizing, understanding, and addressing racism" (Pang & Gibson, 2001, p. 265). Furthermore, Black teachers often have or build relationships with students' communities, leveraging students' out-of-school contexts in the classroom (Philip, 2011; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010; Irvine, 1989). Many Black teachers participate in moving toward the collective liberation of Black people, using culturally relevant and emancipatory pedagogies to empower and equip all students to challenge the racism that continues to oppress Black communities.

Black Teachers and the School Community

Black teachers' impact on the entire school, as an organization, is an undertheorized area of research. When Black teachers are the minority in a school, their unique perspectives related to antiracist and equitable practices often cause tension among staff who comfortably uphold the status quo. This tension, however, should not be written off as unnecessary divisiveness; instead, it should be used to motivate and inspire the school community to create necessary changes (Irvine, 1989). Such changes may include, but are not limited to, new ideas regarding pedagogical practices, discipline procedures, and access to resources for Black students (Gershenson et al., 2023). When Black teachers are about the business of racial justice in schools, they provide a check on policies and practices that do not serve Black students (Grissom et al., 2015). Black teachers, when allowed the freedom and safety to contribute their perspectives in the broader school context, may provide the organization with innovative ideas on how to effectively serve Black students and, by extension, the entire school community (Crisp & Turner, 2011; Ellemers & Rink, 2016). Furthermore, Black teachers who practice culturally sustaining and emancipatory pedagogies create a precedent for the school community as they reimagine the purpose and process of education. As it stands, the public P-12 education system in the US consists of individual schools that maintain hegemonic, racist practices, policies, and curricula (Leonardo, 2009). Without Black teachers who bring divergent ideas on behalf of Black students, these institutions will continue to maintain the status quo. As stated by Mercer and Mercer (1986), "to operate a public school system without black teachers is to teach white supremacy without saying a word" (p. 117).

Improved Academic Outcomes

Research demonstrates that the presence of Black teachers improves the academic achievement of Black students, primarily as evidenced by state mandated standardized test

scores in mathematics and reading (Dee, 2004; Easton-Brooks et al., 2009; Egalite et al., 2015). While these findings certainly support advocacy for more Black teachers serving Black students, studies do not provide evidence of "the exact mechanisms by which own-race teachers influence student achievement" (Dee, 2004, p. 209). Researchers are only able to hypothesize whether students' math and reading scores have improved due to passive teacher effects, the effects prompted by the mere presence of a Black teacher in the classroom, rather than active teacher effects, which are the specific behaviors the teacher employs in the classroom (Dee, 2004).

Increasing the Black teacher workforce with the hope Black students will benefit primarily from passive teacher effects would be a disservice to Black students. Black teachers' specific active effects on Black students are an important area of research that will illuminate useful relational strategies and pedagogical practices used by Black teachers, from which all practitioners can glean knowledge. For example, (Gershenson et al., 2016) found Black teachers held higher expectations for Black students than white teachers and Grissom et al. (2017) found that a 10% increase in the number of Black teachers in a school is associated with a 34% increase in the number of Black students in gifted programs. These two active teacher effects, holding higher expectations and recognizing and affirming giftedness among Black students, among other effects, contribute to improved academic outcomes for Black students.

Improved Behavioral Outcomes

Exposure to same-race teachers can have a positive effect on behavioral outcomes among students of color (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Capers, 2019). For example, Lindsay and Hart (2017) found Black elementary and middle school students who have been, "exposed to a greater share of Black teachers are less likely to be suspended or expelled" (p. 492). While a reduced rate of exclusionary discipline is obviously a favorable result, researchers and practitioners must be

careful to attend to the systemic problems that cause disproportionate disciplinary rates for Black students.

When systemic issues that cause disproportionate suspensions among Black students are centered as the problem, it becomes clear that Black teachers are uniquely positioned to refuse racist policies and reduce harm for Black students. For example, many of the Black female teachers in Farinde-Wu's (2018) study, who preferred to work in an urban context, expressed, "that they seldom saw their students' behaviors as disruptive, disrespectful, or problematic" (p. 258). This supports Lindsay and Hart's (2017) finding that, for Black students, the increased presence of Black teachers in North Carolina's public schools was associated with, "a decline in incident types that involve more teacher discretion, including referrals for defiance-related incidents and interpersonal incidents" (p. 504). Black teachers are closing the discipline gap by creating a community of mutual love, respect, and understanding in their classrooms and refusing to implement discipline policies in ways that cause harm to Black students.

Conclusion

Stakeholders must understand that Black teachers' impact on schools is not due to their passive presence in classrooms that serve Black students. Black teachers' impact can be ascribed to their effective pedagogy, mentorship, and school leadership as influenced by their lived experiences and epistemic beliefs. Every Black teacher is a former Black student. Therefore, as communities seek to recruit Black students into the teaching profession, they must be mindful of how students' experiences in schools have shaped the ways they imagine their potential impact as future Black educators.

Black Teacher Dismissal, Recruitment, and Retention

This section will explore historic and contemporary factors leading to the sparse Black teacher workforce in the US. I will identify specific events and circumstances that led to the dismissal of many Black teachers as well as practices that have created barriers to their recruitment. Next, I will discuss options for teacher preparation and the ways Black people are engaging with these pathways. Finally, I will conclude with contemporary Black teacher retention and the continuous cycle of replacement.

Dismissal of Black Teachers

Black education in the US has always been "inherently subversive and insurrectional to dominant power structures" (Lozenski, 2022, p. 22). Black teachers have historically led the charge toward their liberation through education, often in secret or under the unintended cover of racially segregated schools. Whereas in 1950, nearly half of all Black professionals were teachers, school desegregation following the *Brown* decision resulted in the dismissal of thousands of Black teachers and nearly all Black principals (Cole, 1986; Fenwick, 2022). Following *Brown II*, school boards began to use the National Teacher Examination, an unreliable testing measure with an arbitrary cut-off score, to prevent the integration of Black teachers into previously all-white schools "with all deliberate speed" (Fenwick, 2021). Simultaneously, civil rights legislation expanded professional possibilities for some college educated Black Americans who desired careers in fields previously unavailable to them. Since then, the need to rebuild the Black teacher workforce has been obvious yet unsuccessful.

This inability to recruit Black secondary students into teaching is due, in part, to the cycle of limited access to Black teachers who make it their business to instill, among their Black students, self-determination and a desire to uplift their communities. Instead, a growing number of Black students are being instructed by white teachers who believe deficit narratives about their

intellectual capabilities and teach them to follow instead of expecting them to lead (Foster, 1997). Specifically, the post-Brown era began a widespread cycle in which Black students were subjected to White teachers who consistently questioned their intellectual capacity due to "the widespread belief among Black students' new White teachers that they could not learn, and that, if they did learn, they could never master critical thinking skills" (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, p. 390).

James Baldwin (1963) reminds us that every Black American child can observe the society in which they live and understand that it is not structured for their well-being. He specifically challenges those who are tasked with educating Black students to instill the idea that Black students should never make peace with society's insistence on destroying them. Instead, students must determine their own worth, examine everything, and decide to create change. Fairclough (2004) further explains, "in the environment of the segregated school, teachers enjoyed close relationships with their pupils based on empathy with the individual child and an intimate knowledge of the black community, enabling them to motivate their charges" (p. 44). Prior to *Brown* there was an inevitable cycle of Black teachers who implored Black students to take up this charge toward creating change. However, when Black schools were dismantled, Black teachers were fired, and racially inequitable licensure testing requirements were implemented, this cycle was broken and has yet to be fully repaired.

Recruitment and Retention of Black Teachers

"If we approached training teachers for urban schools differently, we might stop wasting time and money on those who just don't have what it takes to work successfully in urban schools"
(Foster, 1997, p. 149)

Teacher preparation usually occurs in three ways: (1) traditional teacher preparation programs (TPPs) through an institute of higher education (IHE), (2) alternative teacher

certification programs through an IHE, and (3) alternative teacher certification programs not associated with an IHE. Among the 2,223 teacher preparation programs in the US, the availability of alternative routes, entry requirements, and exit requirements vary by state. In 2021, traditional TPPs accommodated approximately 72% of people enrolled in teacher preparation. Since 2013, that percentage has been declining while the percentage of people enrolled in alternative certification programs has been on the rise (USDE, 2023).

Traditional TPPs

Since 1970, Black students have enrolled in college at increasing rates. Despite the fact that Black students are more likely to endure underfunded P-12 schools with underqualified teachers, Black males and females still enroll in college at the rates of 31% and 41%. respectively, compared to their white counterparts who enroll at rates of 33.2% and 43.6% respectively (NCES, 2023). While a higher percentage of Black students than ever before are enrolling in college, very few are choosing traditional TPPs as a path of study. While Black students are 15% of the P-12 population, in 2021, Black prospective teachers accounted for only 7% of those who completed traditional TPPs (USDE, 2023).

In addition to this low rate of enrollment, Black prospective teachers are also less likely than white prospective teachers to continue in their TPP through graduation. In 2021, only 3.2% of bachelor's degrees conferred to Black students were in the field of education (NCES, 2023). One Michigan study found that only 7% of Black students who begin teacher preparation in college remain through the student teaching stage (Kilbride et al., 2023). Attention must be given to the barriers that may prevent Black prospective teachers enrolled in traditional TPPs from completing their certification.

Souto-Manning and Martell (2019) explain that traditional TPPs are disproportionately led by white people, privilege Eurocentric epistemologies, and often disempower Black prospective teachers. Sleeter (2017) also speaks to the pervasiveness of white supremacy and race evasiveness in many teacher education programs that may deter prospective Black students from completing their degree. Furthermore, teacher performance assessments, such as edTPA, have a disproportionately negative impact on minority students, especially those enrolled in colleges with high minority populations (Chung and Zou, 2023). Certification tests also create a barrier for some Black students pursuing a career in teaching; a process Young and Easton-Brooks (2020) call "elimination by examination" (p. 391). For example, one study found that although Black TPP graduates who obtain their teaching certification are likely to remain in the profession for at least 5 years, only 53.6% of Black students in public IHEs with traditional TPPs pass the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification, compared to white students who have a pass rate of 91.6% (Kilbride et al., 2023). The rate of Black student enrollment in and completion of TPPs is incompatible with the growing number of Black P-12 students (USDE, 2023).

Alternative TPPs

Conversely, in 2021, Black students accounted for 17% of those enrolled in alternative programs (USDE, 2023). Alternative programs, which typically aim to recruit individuals who hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than education, have been more successful recruiting Black prospective teachers than TPPs (Madkins, 2011). This implies many prospective teachers are pursuing teaching as a career later in life, rather than enrolling in a TPP immediately after high school. Studies have shown that some alternative routes, such as Teacher Residency Programs, are effective in recruiting and retaining Black teachers, and teachers who participate in these residency programs report feeling more prepared for classroom instruction than their

counterparts who did not participate (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Silva et al.; 2014). It is important to note, however, that alternative certification programs vary widely in terms of both instruction and internship requirements. For example, some programs, though highly populated by Black prospective teachers, do not require a teaching internship experience prior to becoming a lead teacher, causing many teachers to be inadequately prepared and therefore, more likely to leave the profession after only a few years (Farinde-Wu & Griffen, 2019; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020).

Retention

Love (2023) explains that to effectively recruit new Black teachers, schools and administrators should begin by implementing retention strategies focused on support, care, and love for Black teachers who are currently in schools. Black teachers leave the profession at higher rates than teachers from other racial groups, thereby increasing the rate at which schools need to hire Black teachers to fill this void (Campoli, 2017). Furthermore, since Black teachers are more likely than white teachers to work in schools with a substantial number of Black students, this revolving door of new and inexperienced teachers impacts Black students most significantly (Taie & Lewis, 2022). To create an effective retention strategy addressing the needs and concerns of Black teachers, research must explore the specific, expressed needs of Black teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Since Black teachers have varying experiences, it is unsurprising that they express a variety of reasons for leaving the teaching profession. For example, Frank et al. (2021) found racialized microaggressive experiences prompt Black mathematics teachers to consider leaving the profession. Stanley (2020) found Black woman teachers often feel unsupported in their role as a justice-oriented educator, which may lead them to consider leaving the profession. Bristol

(2020b) found Black male teachers who are the lone Black male teacher in their school often experience social isolation. Some of these teachers left the profession because of administrators who were focused on discipline rather than supporting learning (Bristol, 2020a). Carver-Thomas (Carver-Thomas, 2018) suggests an added workload, including being assigned disciplinary roles and taking on extra responsibilities to support Black students outside of class, may contribute to the high turnover of Black teachers.

Conclusion

Although Black teachers' reasons for leaving vary, Black P-12 students, in their extremely limited contact with Black teachers, experience and observe Black teachers who are, in some way, dissatisfied with the current state of the profession. Simultaneously, Black students are overwhelmingly educated by white teachers, some of whom hold deficit views about Black students, undermining their academic achievement (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Oates, 2009). To more fully understand the reasons most Black students do not choose teaching as a viable career path, researchers must explore the ways Black students process and internalize what they have observed during their P-12 experiences. To gain a deeper understanding of Black students' perspectives, the next section will explore the current literature on reasons Black P-12 students do or do not want to pursue teaching as a viable career path.

Reasons Black P-12 Students Do or Do Not Want to Pursue Teaching as a Career Path

In reviewing this literature, I refer to Lortie's attractors to teaching found in his 1975 study. Those attractors include, (1) the opportunity for extended contact and interaction with children and young people, (2) the provision of "a valuable service of special moral worth" (p. 27), (3) the opportunity to remain involved in school life or in a particular subject area, (4) material rewards such as an adequate salary and some prestige, and (5) the convenient working

conditions characteristic of teaching. I also consider Watt and Richardson's (2007) Factors Influencing Teaching as a Career Choice (FIT-Choice) scale which includes attention to social influences, prior teaching and learning experiences, perceptions of teaching tasks and ability, value of the teaching career, personal utility value, and social utility value.

Prior research suggests six general themes that capture the factors affecting Black students' decisions to pursue teaching as a career. The themes include: (1) the prevalence of racism. (2) altruistic ambitions, (3) the presence of Black teachers, (4) encouragement (or discouragement) from adults, (5) personal schooling experiences, and (6) perceptions of the teaching profession. Most themes have been broken down into two more specific sub-themes which should give the reader a more complete picture of how Black students think about choosing teaching as a career.

As a Black American woman and former classroom teacher, I have grounded my work in Critical Race Theory to illuminate the endemic presence of racism and the necessity for counter-storytelling as a means of challenging the dominant narrative in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This review illuminates the voices of Black people who are often underrepresented in teaching career choice research. More specifically, this work is rooted in an understanding that, "BlackCrit helps to explain precisely how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded, and disdained, even in their highly visible place within celebratory discourses on race and diversity" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417). Therefore, this literature review will explore Black students' decision-making processes and how those processes are studied. I will begin with common factors that appeared throughout the articles followed by trends in their methodological approaches as they relate to themes that were uncovered. There will be a discussion of these

themes in the context of the aforementioned theoretical and conceptual frameworks followed by implications for stakeholders.

Racism

This theme encompasses descriptions of students' specific racist encounters during P-12 schooling and general views of a racist education system.

Racist encounters

Nearly half of the articles reviewed detailed students' painful memories of personally experiencing racism in P-12 schools and with a particular teacher (Bianco et al., 2011; Chu, 2023; Curci et al., 2022; Farinde et al., 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Su, 1996). For example, in Johnson's (2014) autoethnographic study, he shared, "my fifth-grade year, I had my first encounter with racism... I thought I was incapable of succeeding as a Black male" (p. 2104). Similarly, a Black female teacher candidate recalled an incident during their P-12 schooling in which, "a student called me the "n" word and I was like where is the response? The teacher did nothing, and I was like this isn't how it's supposed to be" (Farinde et al., 2015, p. 40). Su (1996) explains that Black pre-service teachers in their study cited both covert and overt instances of discrimination. Similarly, a high school student shared her experience with racialized microaggressions as she, "recalled a White teacher who did not remember her name after teaching her for two semesters, which made her wonder 'well, what does that mean? Are you not paying attention to me?' "(Chu, 2023, p. 15).

Racist system

The literature also details the prevalence of racism in the P-12 school system, higher education, and the teaching profession. In their qualitative research on high school aged, high-achieving African-American boys' perceptions of the teaching profession (n=63), Graham and

Erwin (2011) found participants viewed schools as oppressive institutions. Dinkins and Thomas (2016), in their qualitative study on African-American students' persistence in undergraduate teacher preparation programs (n = 10), found that one college student did not want to teach children because he refused to be a part of a system of oppression. He did not want to be someone who “pushed that agenda" (p. 34). This is echoed by Goings and Bianco (2016) who explained that the Black male high school students in their study “found it difficult to enter a profession that has egregiously miseducated and disenfranchised them as students" (p. 642). Both Gordon (1994) and Su (1996) reported that institutions of higher education were not positive environments for some of the Black undergraduates involved in their studies. Black high school seniors in Summerhill et al.'s study (1998) cited "fear of discrimination in the teaching profession" (p. 233) as a deterrent to teaching. Similarly, the Black boys in Graham and Erwin’s (2011) study believed white parents would be disrespectful toward them because they are Black.

Altruistic ambitions

Altruism and community service are prevalent themes in the career choices of students entering service professions. The articles reviewed, as they pertain to Black students and teachers, centered two sub-themes: teacher as a role model and teacher as an agent of social justice.

Role model

Wigle and Kostelnik (1999) found that “wanting to be like a favorite teacher” was a contributing factor to their interest in the teaching profession for 50% of the 94 rural Black students surveyed about becoming a teacher. Goings and Bianco (2016) concluded the Black high school students in their qualitative study (n = 22) considered teaching to be a viable option because they took pride in being a ‘‘role model’’ and ‘‘big brother” to younger children in the

community (p. 637). One study participant, Michael, described his experience with a Black community college professor who helped him see how education “can help us not just get a better job but give life more meaning,” and Michael wanted to have that same impact on his future students (Dinkins and Thomas, 2016, p. 31). Importantly, when Black students discuss the need for role models, it is often expressed as a racialized need. For example, in Dinkins and Thomas’ (2016) study, Lawrence, who was a preservice teacher, described how “kids need someone to look up to, especially someone of color because they do not really see that all the time" (p. 32). Another preservice teacher in Wilder’s (2000) study shared, “I want to be a role model for Black kids" (p. 80).

Social Justice

Black people in the studies reviewed were conscious of social justice issues in their communities (Su, 1996; Bianco et al., 2011; Dinkins and Thomas, 2016; Mccray, 2002). For example, one preservice teacher explained she had an interest in teaching because, “a lot of problems that exist in poor areas can be greatly reduced by intervening while the kids are young. I have more of a social interest" (Su, 1996, p. 125). Like this prospective teacher, other participants explained they were attracted to the teaching career because they wanted justice for students. This was expressed by a teacher candidate who believed that because she experienced a lack of justice in her own life, she could be “more sensitive and compassionate toward children at risk" (Sczesci & Spillman, 2012, p. 26). In their qualitative study with Black high school males, Bianco et al. (2011) found that the opportunity to "help young people and become agents of change seemed more important than salary for several participants" (p. 379). In their qualitative study with six female HBCU teacher candidates, Mccray et al. (2002) found they believed “teaching was responsive to the needs of the community and thus central to African

Americans' cultural survival, independence, and self-reliance" (p. 281). Although the need for social justice is a motivator for some Black students to become teachers, it drives other students away from teaching. For example, in Dinkin and Thomas' (2016) study with Black undergraduates who had enrolled in education courses at some point during college, one student changed her major from education to sociology because she recognized that teachers make a difference but believed she "could be better for the community" if she made change on a "community, countrywide, state kind of scale" (p. 33).

Black Teachers

Another common theme in the literature is the significance of Black teachers. Studies specifically discuss the presence (or lack) of Black teachers in schools and Black students' relationships with those Black teachers. These two ways of thinking about Black teachers influenced Black students' decisions to become or not become teachers.

Presence (or lack) of Black Teachers

The study participants featured in the articles reviewed recognized the lack or presence of Black teachers in their own schooling experiences. In Bianco et al.'s (2011) study with Black high school males, participants reported having between one and three teachers who shared their ethnic or racial background. The high school students interviewed in Goings and Bianco (2016) explained they would not enter teaching because they "wanted to enter professions where they saw themselves as more represented and appreciated" (p. 637). However, some Black students are drawn to teaching because of the lack of Black teachers. A preservice teacher in Wilder's (1999) study explained that she wanted to teach in a public school because "that's where most of the Black kids are" (p. 80). Two female undergraduate participants also recognized the importance of their presence as Black teachers because their students, "might not see an African

American teacher again," (Dinkins and Thomas, 2016, p. 32) and “seeing an [African American teacher] may give some child hope to one day become a teacher themselves" (Mccray, 2002, p. 287).

Relationships with Black teachers

In Dinkins and Thomas’ (2016) study, an undergraduate student expressed that the most influential person in her decision to become a teacher was the only African American female teacher she ever had, because, as an African American woman, she could see herself in that teacher. Johnson (2014), in his autoethnography, recalled a Black teacher, Ms. Ryans, who invested her time, care, and love, transforming his life and leading him to a career in teaching. In prior research, other students said they believe it is important for Black students to relate to and establish personal connections with Black teachers (Goings and Bianco, 2016; Bianco et al., 2011; Curci et al., 2023). A preservice teacher in Szecsi and Spillman’ (2012) research expounds on this idea stating, “I think it would be nice for students to have a young teacher or a teacher of color to show them that you don't have to go into the entertainment industry or… the athletic world in order to be successful" (p. 25).

Encouragement and Discouragement

Encouragement or discouragement from entering the teaching profession appeared as a factor affecting the decisions of Black students to become teachers. Encouragement and discouragement often came from friends, family, and school personnel.

Family and friends

Family and friends can influence students’ decisions to pursue teaching as a career. In their survey results (n = 124), Wigle and Kostelnik (1999) found that encouragement from family members and non-family members were both highly related to interest in teaching as a

career among Black rural high school students in the South. On the contrary, the Black male high school students Goings and Bianco (2016) interviewed expressed that family and community members wanted them to pursue better paying jobs . Likewise, a Black, female pre-service teacher in Szecsi and Spillman's (2012) study explained, "my father discouraged it; he did not want me to go into teaching" (p. 25). This student also explained, although her brother supported her decision to become a teacher, he expected her to eventually become a principal or assistant principal and "not just stick with teaching" (p. 25).

Teachers

After interviewing students and hearing their perspectives, researchers agree that teachers play an important role in Black students' career decision-making processes (Bianco et al., 2011; Mack et al., 2003; Dinkins and Thomas, 2016; Chu, 2023). Bianco et al. (2011) found high school teachers were the most influential in the students' decision to be a teacher. A Black high school student in their study said, "Ms. F, Ms. B... They think I would be a great teacher. They see how I am with other kids" (Bianco et al., 2011, p. 373). A community college student noted the importance of her high school history teacher giving her a note stating: "you will be a great teacher" (Dinkins and Thomas, 2016, p. 31). Some participants in various studies reported that a teacher in their family encouraged them to pursue teaching as a career. For example, an undergraduate education major from Wilder's (1999) study shared, "My mom's a teacher and she always told me it was a good field to go into" (p. 80). Similarly, a community college student pursuing education explained that teachers in his family "kind of pushed" (Dinkins and Thomas, 2016, p. 30) him toward becoming a teacher.

Additionally, Mack et al. (2003) surveyed 127 Black high school students and found that lack of encouragement is an obstacle for students pursuing an interest in teaching. A participant

in Chu (2023) who recently completed a high school GYO program stated they believe many students have heard teachers say, "'teachers don't make all that money. You are so bright, you should become a doctor, a lawyer or anything else… ' And so those negative connotations of this, um, this career field, can really discourage someone who isn't too sure about becoming a teacher" (p. 16). Furthermore, a Black high school student in Bianco et al. (2011) believed “most teachers are White and they don’t encourage students of color to become teachers" (p. 374). This student saw this lack of encouragement as a way for White teachers to exercise their power over and maintain low standards for Black students.

For various reasons, some students are encouraged to teach, and others are discouraged. In their phenomenological study with six Black in-service teachers, Farinde et al. (2015) found "many participants in this study were advised against teaching" (p. 46). However, according to Shipp’s (1999) study of Black, education majors in college, participants viewed “encouragement of others” as one of the top three most attractive aspects of a career in teaching. Whether Black students are pushed toward or away from teaching, it is clear that family, friends, and teachers have an important role in their decision-making processes.

Personal Schooling Experience

Participants in nine of the studies I reviewed expressed how their personal schooling experiences influenced their desire to become or not become a teacher (Bianco et al., 2011; Chu, 2023; Curci et al., 2022; Farinde et al., 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; A. ; Graham & Erwin, 2011; Marrun et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2004; Szecsi & Spillman, 2012). Both positive and negative schooling experiences helped shape their views of the teaching profession as a viable career choice. For example, low expectations from teachers, labeling, and stigmatization were significant in deterring some high-achieving Black boys from pursuing teaching as a profession

(Goings and Bianco, 2016; Graham & Erwin, 2011). Contrarily, access to caring teachers and the opportunity to explore and engage in aspects of teaching were positive experiences that encouraged students to consider entering the teaching profession (Goings and Bianco, 2016; Szesci and Spillman, 2012; Bianco et al., 2011; Farinde,2015; Chu, 2023). Some students in the studies reviewed explained that negative experiences with teachers encouraged them to pursue the teaching profession to intentionally counter their personal experiences. For example, a male high school student in Chu (2023) explained, "I didn't have a lot of teachers who went outside of just teaching... And then some of the stuff I didn't even learn because they didn't teach you right. So, I got a lot of stuff about teachers that I've seen that I don't want to do" (p. 15). Another student in that study explained that, as a Black girl, she often felt “overlooked, or not fully engaged,” which fueled her desire to “help children to really love learning and enjoy coming into the classroom” (Chu, 2023, p. 15).

Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

It is not surprising that in the studies I reviewed, students’ views and perceptions of the teaching profession, in general, were very influential in their decisions about whether or not to become a teacher. This is consistent with Lortie’s (2020) finding that two of the five “attractors to teaching” are the idea that teaching is “a valuable service of special moral worth” (p. 27) and material reward such as salary and prestige. What may be surprising, however, is that researchers are not fully in agreement about the role of these two so-called attractors in Black students’ decision-making processes.

A Valuable Service of Special Moral Worth

The African American male high school honors students in Smith et al. (2004) noted how needed and valuable teachers are, even though they did not all choose teaching as a career path

for themselves. For example, one student expressed, “If you really think about it, teachers are the backbone of a community" (p. 81). Although Lortie (2020) describes this positive perception of the teaching profession as an attractor to teaching, some Black students have negative perceptions of teaching leading them away from the profession. For example, the African American male teens in Bianco et al. (2011) expressed that the level of respect for teaching careers was low in their community. Similarly, a Black pre-service teacher in Su (1996) expressed, “in minority cultures, the parents aspire for their kids to do better than them. This cannot be achieved through a profession like teaching because it has such a low status" (p. 126).

Material Reward

Similar to views about the value and status of the teaching profession, views of its material rewards vary across different samples. In a survey with 39 Black high school students, Summerhill et al. (1998), found that one of the top three factors influencing those students to consider teaching as a viable career path was a favorable expected salary. On the contrary, a Black pre-service teacher in Su’s (1996) study made the following remark, “I hate to blame money but I think teaching is not very attractive when a lot of us are not in the upper echelons of society" (p. 126). Similarly, a Black male high school student interviewed by Goings and Bianco (2016) expressed, "if you’re going to do something to help people, you should do the thing that you get paid the most for,” and in his opinion, teaching was not the most viable option (p. 639). Also related to the perception that teachers’ salaries are relatively low, a Black college student in Wilder’s (1999) study said, “my teacher told the class how much money teachers are paid and I could not believe it. No. I don't want to be a teacher" (p. 80).

These varying and contradictory views about teachers receiving a satisfactory income might be explained by Goings and Bianco’s (2016) finding that students’ perceptions of the

teaching career often come from how teachers talk about the profession around students. The Black male high school students in their study expressed that teaching is not attractive because “teachers complain about how teacher reforms have negatively impacted the profession and the low pay" (p. 639). This is consistent with Mack et al.’s (2003) view that lack of positive information about the profession contributes to students’ disinterest in pursuing teaching as a career. Furthermore, students often form their perceptions of teaching based on their observations. Therefore, when students observe "a teacher being stressed, tired, and angry," they often conclude teaching is "a stressful job" (Marrun et al., 2021, p. 14). Students' perceptions of the costs and benefits of the teaching profession do not exist within a vacuum, they are based on what students hear and observe from teachers and other community members.

Trends in Methodological Approaches

The prevalence of themes varied by study methodology. None of the studies that relied on survey data mention participants' experiences with Black teachers as a factor in Black students’ decisions to become teachers. These studies also do not mention racism, with the exception of the Summerhill et al. (1998) study that allowed students to expound on their survey responses using open-ended text. These results indicate that the methodological approach by which researchers come to understand the reasons for Black students’ decisions to become or not become teachers may affect their findings. Studies that relied on quantitative data were missing key findings affecting Black students specifically.

Discussion

"African Americans may enter the teaching profession with a very different agenda than do Whites." (Shipp, 1999)

On Methodology

Research reviewed in this paper emphasizes the importance of considering the lived experiences of Black high school students when seeking to understand their reasons for choosing or not choosing teaching as a possible career. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain that we cannot expect to make progress in the education system without exalting the stories of Black students and teachers. If researchers are to illuminate the decision-making process of Black students, they will be most effective in doing so without the assumption of white normativity. Studies seeking to compare Black students' decision-making processes to those of their White peers will always overlook factors specific to the Black experience in the US (Cooc & Kim, 2023; Klassen et al., 2011). Said differently, a survey that attempts to uncover factors that contribute to a Black student's decision to become a teacher will only be as effective in discovering the truth as those factors allow. If researchers expect survey results to help them understand Black students' decision-making processes, that survey must be centered in Black experience, rather than assumptions of White normativity (Heinz, 2015). Furthermore, if researchers continue to use surveys rooted in assumptions of white normativity, they should function as a catalyst for conversation, not the final word. Participants in the qualitative studies explained their decisions to (not) become a teacher using stories from their own schooling experiences which included marginalization, microaggressions, and exclusion (Chu, 2023; Johnson, 2014; Bianco et al., 2011). Studies that provide direct quotes clarifying students' decision-making processes can lead to deeper understanding of the ways teachers and schools contribute to students' choices to (not) teach and to more effective anti-racist and equitable paths forward.

Black students and Black teachers

It should not be overlooked that experiences of racism, whether personal or systemic, appeared in almost every qualitative study reviewed. Racism affects each person differently; therefore, generalizations cannot be made regarding the role it plays in Black students' decisions to become teachers. For example, Bartanen et al.'s (2023) study found Black pre-service teachers (PSTs) are 3.6 times more likely than white PSTs to discuss their experiences of adversity when explaining their reasons for pursuing the teaching profession. However, the literature reviewed in this study confirms that attention to the ways, "anti-blackness allows one to capture the depths of suffering of Black children and educators in predominantly white schools" (Dumas, 2016, p. 16) may help us better understand the reasons Black students are (not) choosing teaching as a viable career. The racism Black students experience in schools impacts their view of the teaching profession and, therefore, their decisions to become or not become teachers.

Black high school students are likely to discuss the possibility of teaching with teachers, especially Black teachers if they are present. The ways teachers talk about the profession can influence these students' decision-making process (Summerhill, 1998; Dinkins and Thomas, 2016; Goings and Bianco, 2016). In prior research, some students discuss Black teachers who made a difference in their lives, whereas others describe the lack of Black teachers as discouraging. This is why Love (2023) explains that the best way to recruit new Black teachers is to begin with retention strategies focused on support, care, and love for current Black teachers. Black teachers who have favorable teaching experiences are some of the greatest assets for recruiting students to be teachers. Black teachers who have positive experiences can talk honestly about their profession and the impact they have on students in a way that encourages students to explore the possibility of becoming a teacher. Opportunity to work with young people, material reward, and general views of the teaching profession could potentially be

attractors to teaching for Black students. Since most students will encounter very few Black teachers during their P-12 education, it may be difficult for Black students to see themselves in the role of a teacher. Therefore, it is important to consider the role of Black teachers in recruiting Black students.

Beyond Altruism

A desire to be altruistic is a common theme among different service professions across the world (Kwok et al., 2022). However, Kwok et al. (2022) call attention to the importance of studying the nuance in teacher motivation within specific cultural and geographic contexts. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the Black American community, the calling to become a teacher reaches beyond a broad notion of altruism and toward the need for Black mentoring and Black social justice advocacy in the local community. For example, Black students and teachers who hold altruistic motivations do not often speak in broad terms; instead, they desire to use teaching to contribute to the uplift of the Black community (Szecsi & Spillman, 2012; Su, 1996; Dinkins and Thomas, 2016). In addition, both prospective and in-service teachers highlight the importance of curriculum centered in diverse critical perspectives and providing space for students to examine the world in which they live and consider how they can best support their communities (Goings and Bianco, 2016; Johnson, 2014). Black teachers who take a critical approach to their profession represent more than a proximal view of success, they use their power and perspective to lead students toward reimagining education and their potential role in shaping the future through a teaching career.

Implications for Researchers

Research on Black teacher recruitment and retention must attend to the lived experiences of Black students and practitioners. Black teachers often enter the teaching profession to bring

about social change; therefore, further research must explore how young people make sense of racialized experiences and how those experiences impact their decisions to enter the teaching profession. Research must also address the racialized experiences of Black practitioners and the ways those experiences influence their decisions to remain in the teaching profession. Finally, researchers who recognize academic and disciplinary disparities along racial lines are caused by systemic inequities must continue their exploration of the active ways Black teachers help improve Black students' schooling experiences and outcomes. Black teachers who engage in liberatory pedagogy must be regarded as exemplars in educational research on Black students' success within and beyond P-12 schooling.

The teaching profession is very attainable for all students, yet research often relies on high-achieving students for data. The best teachers were not always at the top of their class, as students; therefore, researchers should be intentional about identifying factors that affect average students' decisions to become teachers, not just high-achieving students. In addition, although it is outside the scope of this study, to help create a more diverse teacher workforce, researchers should be intentional about illuminating the needs, fears, and perceptions of teaching in other minoritized communities.

Finally, Mccray et. al. (2002) explains that it is not possible to draw conclusions about the recruitment, preparation, and retention of African American teachers from studies that do not consider African Americans in their research. A survey used to shed light on issues affecting Black students should be guided by Black experiences and used in tandem with observations and interviews. The survey tools used in some of the articles reviewed (i.e., Summerhill,1998; Shipp,1999; Wigle and Kostelnik,1999) were based on Lortie's (2020) types of attractors and Ginzburg et al. 's (1950) comprehensive theory of occupational choice. Both of these frameworks

relied heavily on white people in their development and did not specifically take Black experiences into account. Furthermore, in analyzing survey data based on FIT-Choice, Leech et al. (2019) found that high school students' views differ from those of pre-service and in-service teachers. Therefore, as surveys centering the Black experience are created to uncover factors that affect Black high school students, specifically, researchers should not rely on or extrapolate from data collected from postsecondary and professional adults. New survey tools should be created based on data gathered from the lived experiences of Black high school students.

Conclusion

Black teachers are invaluable as this country moves toward equitable and high-quality education for all students. Because every Black teacher is a former Black student, researchers and other stakeholders engaged in the recruitment and retention of Black teachers must consider how Black students' schooling experiences have shaped the ways they imagine their potential impact as future Black educators. By elevating the voices of Black students, stakeholders will gain insights that can inform effective strategies for increasing the number of Black students who engage in teacher preparation during and after high school.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The need for more Black teachers in the US has been the subject of both political and academic discourse since the 1980's (Fenwick, 2021; Madkins, 2011). In recent years, stakeholders have suggested several strategies for increasing the number of Black teachers in the P-12 public school system (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; DeRamus-Byers, 2021). Simultaneously, many states have implemented initiatives designed to diversify their teacher workforce (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2023). Often, these plans seek to encourage Black high school students to pursue an undergraduate degree in teaching using very limited data on Black high school students' views of the teaching profession. This is because most current research about Black prospective teachers relies on data from post-high school participants who have already chosen to teach instead of analyzing the decision-making processes of high school students (Fray & Gore, 2018). Although there may be some similarities, Black high school students likely have a different, "motivation to teach, perceptions of teaching, and social pressures to teach/not teach" than people who have graduated from high school (Leech et al, 2019, p. 978). In addition, influential research on attractors to teaching often rely on white participants (Lortie, 2020; Watt & Richardson, 2007) whose perceptions of teaching may differ from those of Black high school students.

Every student who attends public school is well acquainted with the teaching profession. Unfortunately, many Black students reach the end of their public-school experience with no desire to pursue this profession they have actively observed for most of their lives (Lortie, 2020). The experiences of Black high school students in US schools lead them to draw conclusions about the viability of the teaching profession as a career choice (i.e., an option that is both

possible and favorable) (Leech et al., 2019). To attract more Black high school students to teaching, it is important for researchers to begin to understand their decision-making processes. Both the Black students who have decided to teach and those who have chosen a different career path can inform best practices for recruiting Black high school students into the teaching profession. Therefore, I have created a conceptual framework to help researchers understand, from these students' own perspectives:

1) What factors contribute to Black high school students' decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching and

2) The extent to which their experiences in schools impact this decision-making process.

This conceptual framework draws on key concepts from Lortie's (2020) attractors to teaching and the Factors Influencing Teaching as a Career Choice (FIT-Choice) model combined with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and BlackCrit to help us understand the reasons Black high school students do and do not choose to pursue teaching as a viable career path. Lortie's (2020) attractors to teaching and the FIT-Choice model are important for this dissertation study because they each identify key elements related to choosing teaching as a career. It is important to ground this research in CRT and BlackCrit because these theories help explain the ways structural racism, anti-Blackness, and resistance to them contribute to Black students' decision-making processes. Whereas the aforementioned attractors to teaching lack attention to Black students' racialized experiences, as compared to white students, I use this composite framework to better understand both attractors and deterrents to teaching through a race centered lens that highlights the perspectives of Black students as I attend to the ways they experience anti-Blackness and structural racism.

This chapter will explain my conceptual framework in six sections. The first and second will explain Critical Race Theory (CRT) and BlackCrit and how they are used to understand the ways anti-blackness and structural racism impact Black students. The next two sections explain Lortie's (2020) attractors/facilitators to teaching and the FIT-Choice model (Watt and Richardson, 2007); two frameworks used to understand why people enter the teaching profession. Then, I will explain how the teaching frameworks can be understood through the lens of CRT and BlackCrit to help researchers understand Black high school students' decisions regarding teaching as a career. The fifth section details a composite framework that can provide a more complete lens for understanding Black high school students' decision-making processes. The final section provides two important implications for using this new framework to understand why Black high school students choose or do not choose teaching as a career path.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970's as legal scholars across the US attempted to understand why the promises of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1900's had not been realized in the lived experiences of Black people throughout the US (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For example, early scholars used CRT to explain why, 25 years after the *Brown* ruling desegregated schools, Black students were still experiencing educational inequities (Bell, 1980). Since its inception, CRT scholars have agreed upon various tenets that centralize race and racism as ever-present factors in US systems of injustice. CRT's central themes include the assertion that racism is endemic, interest convergence, a critique of liberalism, intersectionality, anti-essentialism, whiteness as property, and counter-storytelling (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

CRT is used to not only understand, but also transform society toward ending racial oppression and all other forms of oppression (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017; Lynn and Parker, 2006). CRT has been used widely by researchers as both an epistemology and methodology to understand and fight against racial injustice in the US school system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this section, I will explain the key tenets of CRT and how these concepts inform educational research.

The Endemic Nature of Racism

Bell (2018) reminds us that, although people are easily mesmerized by the illusion that time will solve the problem of racism in the US, realistically, racism will remain "a permanent component of American life" (p. 16). To understand this idea, we must first move past notions of racism as, primarily, interpersonal and individual prejudices. Instead, we must understand racism as structural, "a network of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels... responsible for the production and reproduction of systemic racial advantages for some (the dominant racial group) and disadvantages for others (the subordinated races)" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1360). Therefore, CRT scholars view structural racism as permanent and endemic in US institutions, including schools. However, post-*Brown*, it became increasingly difficult to identify structural racism in educational policy and practice (e.g., as reflected in racially disparate outcomes in academic tracking and assignment to special education) due, in part, to the "increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and racial practices" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 94). Therefore, this study attempts to illuminate the ways structural racism impacts Black students' decisions to choose or not choose teaching as a career.

Interest Convergence

Racial realists understand that "racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 21). From this perspective, those in power have no incentive to disrupt racial hierarchy unless they have something to gain: unless there is interest convergence. Bell (1980) explains that any civil rights gains for Black people, most notably the *Brown* decision, occur parallel to favorable outcomes for white elites. Bell reveals the brief convergence of interests that precipitated the *Brown* decision which subsequently gave the illusion of a change in attitude toward racial discrimination in the US. The *Brown* decision made the US look favorable in the eyes of emerging nations only to be incrementally rolled back and ultimately ineffective in creating the intended outcome of closing the gap between Black and white students' academic outcomes and opportunities (Bell, 1980). CRT scholars identify interest convergence in education policy and practice that gives the illusion of progress toward racial justice. Therefore, as this study intends to inform policy that decreases the Black teacher shortage, I first had to understand how interest convergence led to current education policy and then be realistic about future advances toward more racially just outcomes in light of prevailing structural racism and colorblind and neo-liberal solutions.

Critique of Liberalism

Liberalism celebrates principles such as individualism, meritocracy, free competition, and equality of opportunity even when these principles lead to unequal outcomes and the reproduction of a racialized hierarchy (Esposito & Murphy, 2010). Although liberal principles are not inherently unjust, when applied within the context of systemic racism, they benefit those in power and keep marginalized groups oppressed. For example, civil rights legislation gave the appearance of equality of opportunity. Leonardo (2009) explains that after the civil rights movement, Black folks were told that, in this so-called meritocracy, failure to achieve academic

or financial success was due solely to their own shortcomings with no regard for structural racism. Many liberals consciously or unconsciously uphold the status quo when they insist that law should be colorblind and neutral, regardless of circumstance or history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Reject Colorblindness

Within their critique of liberalism, CRT theorists reject colorblindness, the idea that attention to race is unnecessary or even unjust in policy and practice. In fact, Bonilla-Silva (2015) has called this ideology "color-blind racism…the superficial extension of the principles of liberalism to racial matters that results in 'raceless' explanations for all sort of race-related affairs" (p. 1364). CRT theorists submit that colorblind approaches to addressing inequality in the US "keep minorities in subordinate positions" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 27). López (2003) posits that colorblindness leads to an individualistic view of racism that, "only serves to protect the idea of a neutral social order by moving the focus away from the barriers and inequities that exist in society and refocusing it on the ‘ignorant’ individual(s)" (p. 69). Leonardo (2009) advances the idea that colorblindness in school curriculum and policy leads to a commonly held belief that racial disparities in educational outcomes are the "unfortunate outcomes of group competition, uneven social development, or worse, as stubborn cultural explanations of the inferiority of people of color" (p. 127). In analyzing Black high school students' experiences in schools and with teachers, I also reject a colorblind ideology that assumes an "everything but racism" explanation for Black students' interest or disinterest in teaching as a profession (Harper, 2012).

Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality

CRT scholars understand that oppressed people cannot be essentialized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). That is, there is no one commonly held experience and, therefore, no one universal solution for all oppressed people. Furthermore, oppressed people may experience compounding forms of oppression. The term intersectionality, born out of Black feminist movements and popularized in the mainstream by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), is used to understand and explain overlapping systems of oppression (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Students in schools might experience oppression on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, or disability, and each combination warrants a different approach toward a just solution. Moving toward justice in education for Black students after hundreds of years of unjust policy requires we recognize there is not one singular "Black experience" and policy must account for multiple forms of oppression.

Whiteness as Property

Whiteness denotes more than a particular phenotypic appearance. Similar to private property, whiteness allows exclusive benefits as long as one is invited into its boundaries. Whiteness also provides particular protections for those within its scope. Therefore, to maintain a racialized hierarchy, whiteness has been encoded in US law and protected through policy (Harris, 1993). For example, in schools, whiteness has been protected through housing segregation that ensures predominately white schools remain as such and receive funding based on property value. These policies may seem colorblind, but they uphold a racial hierarchy and afford privileges to students and teachers who attend predominantly white schools.

Counter-storytelling

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) explain counter-storytelling in education research as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). They

caution that education researchers sometimes use stories to uphold dominant (white) cultural and deficit-based narratives about marginalized people. Accordingly, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) make clear that counter-storytelling "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 171). For example, in qualitative interviews, Black high school students have explained how their experiences with race and racism in schools shape their views of the teaching profession and their consideration of teaching as a viable career option (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Graham & Erwin, 2011; Marrun et al., 2021). Therefore, this research project gives Black students space to collectively name their experiences in schools, including those of harm and marginality. I illuminate their experiential knowledge, recognizing that, in education research, the "experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

Black Critical Theory

Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) was developed as a branch of CRT that decenters the relationship between race and white supremacy and draws attention to anti-Blackness as "an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance" (ross, 2019, p. 2). That is, BlackCrit recognizes that, although it is important for CRT to uncover the ways white supremacy fuels racism toward all those racialized as "non-white," particular attention must be given to the negative social positioning of "blackness" and, subsequently, those who are racialized as "Black." Anti-Blackness provides theory to describe and understand the ways Black people are positioned as "the embodiment of problem, a thing rather than a people suffering from problems created by anti-Blackness" (Dumas, 2016, p. 15). To engage with the experiences of Black students in schools, this study uses BlackCrit to "come to a deeper understanding of the Black

condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13).

Dumas (2014) asserts that P-12 schools are a site of suffering for Black students and educators. Although the *American Dream* narrative positions schools as the 'great equalizer' in society, Black students suffer as they realize the "history and persistence of anti-black disregard and subjugation" (Dumas, 2014, p. 3), particularly in education. For example, anti-blackness was at the root of policies that allowed school boards to fire Black teachers and close black schools after the *Brown* decision by positioning blackness as the problem to be solved rather than inequitable facilities, funding, and access to curriculum. Furthermore, "anti-Blackness serves to reinforce the ideological and material 'infrastructure' of educational inequity—the misrecognition of students and communities of color, and the (racialized) maldistribution of educational resources" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 432). For example, Black students experience the erasure of Black language through linguistic violence against Blackness in schools (Baker-Bell, 2020). Black students experience anti-black curriculum violence through their experiences in Math and ELA classrooms (Johnson et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2019). Black students also experience disproportionate disciplinary action from white teachers who have been socialized and trained in anti-black teacher education spaces (Bryan, 2017; Coles & Stanley, 2021). Therefore, this study is grounded in the reality that anti-blackness is endemic in P-12 schools, Black students are suffering, and this suffering influences their decisions to participate in the teaching profession.

BlackCrit also creates space for people to imagine freedom from the suffering and violence associated with anti-blackness. Moreover, BlackCrit encourages us to imagine "a world in which our ontological relationality is not to Whiteness, anti-Blackness, and systemic violence; a world in which we are not defined by a purpose of survival, resistance, and a fight for freedom"

(Martin et al., 2019, p. 47). Although this reality has never been true for individuals racialized as Black, moving toward freedom requires we navigate the heaviness of anti-Blackness in schools as we dream of ways to protect, encourage, and create more just futures for Black students (ross & Givens, 2023). In research in P-12 schools, this liberatory imagination helps us conceptualize ways to reduce suffering and improve Black students' experiences in schools (ross, 2019).

Dan Lortie and recruitment into teaching

Lortie, in his book *Schoolteacher* (1975/2020), uses a historical review, national and local surveys, findings from observational studies by other researchers, and interviews to describe, analyze, and interpret the nature of the teaching profession. This book is often considered a seminal text among researchers studying teaching as a career choice. Lortie (2020) draws on data from 94 interviews with teachers from "Five Towns" (p. 245) in Massachusetts and questionnaire responses from Dade County (Florida) teachers collected between 1963 and 1964. The Five Towns sample consists of teachers from 13 schools across five suburban districts in the Boston metropolitan area (two high income, one median income, and two low income). This section will explain Lortie's findings regarding recruitment into the teaching profession.

Attractors to Teaching

Using interview and survey data from in-service teachers, Lortie (2020) describes five attractors to teaching: 1) interpersonal relationships, 2) service, 3) continuation of work in a specific field, 4) material benefits, and 5) time compatibility. The interpersonal theme describes teaching as a career that provides the opportunity to work with people. The service theme describes teaching as a "valuable service of special moral worth" that gives the "opportunity for rendering important service" (Lortie, 2020, p. 28). He further asserts that, "teaching as service is more likely to appeal to people who approve of prevailing practice than to those who are critical

of it" (Lortie, 2020, p. 29). Lortie (2020) explains the continuation theme as individuals' desire to teach either as a continuation of their attachment to school or their academic interests. Lortie (2020) suggests those who desire to continue in a school setting probably "approve of existing arrangements and will be less likely to press for change" (p. 30). Finally, money, security, and prestige are considered material benefits, and time compatibility refers to "responses relating working hours to other obligations and pursuits" (p. 32).

Early Decision to Teach

Lortie (2020) suggests each of the five attractors to teaching are based on the assumption that people will make rational decisions after weighing the costs and benefits of teaching compared to other career choices. He does recognize, however, that children may make an early decision to pursue teaching because of "emotional experiences" (p. 42) rather than relying on a cost benefit analysis. He posits three ways a student's social environment may impact their early decision to become a teacher: 1) identification with teachers and the marginality hypothesis, 2) continuity within the family, and 3) labeling by significant others. First, Lortie explains that some participants in his study emphasized a strong identification with a particular teacher or teachers. He suggests that some may have identified with teachers early in life "to resolve sharp problems of identity induced by marginal status" (p. 43). He frames such identification in terms of culturally or socially marginalized immigrant children who look to their teachers as a proximal example of becoming Americanized. The second way social environment may contribute to early decisions to become a teacher is through modeling by parents or other family members who are teachers. The final social interaction that may lead to an early decision to teach is when an important adult labels a child's actions or personality as consistent with that of a teacher.

Apprenticeship of Observation

Although Lortie (2020) suggests the socialization factors above may lead to an early decision to teach, he also recognizes that "socialization is a subjective process" (p. 61) that yields different results for students based on experience. He proposes that one important aspect of socialization into teaching is the notion of teaching as an "apprenticeship of observation" (p. 61). Lortie explains that teaching is an apprenticeship because, unlike most other professions, students consistently observe teachers in action and draw conclusions about what it means to enact teaching. He explains that, unlike other apprenticeship models, students are not passive observers; they are actively in relationship with teachers, which evokes an emotional response to teachers' actions. Lortie (2020) concludes that, through an apprenticeship of observation, what students learn about teaching "is intuitive and imitative…based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles" (p. 62).

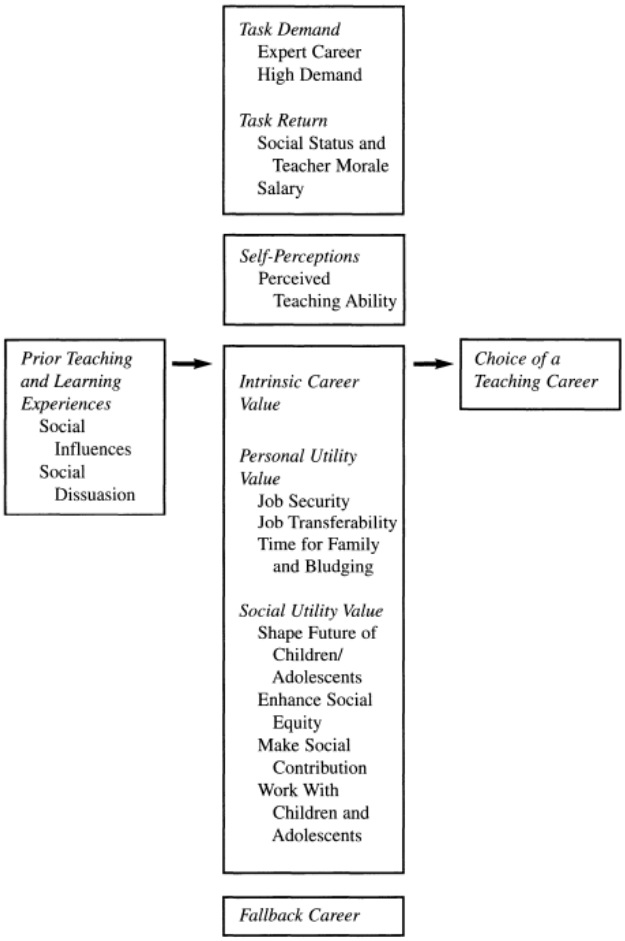
Factors Influencing Teaching (FIT) Choice Model

The FIT Choice model was developed and validated in Australia by Watt and Richardson (2007) to provide a theoretical and analytical framework to guide research on teaching as a career choice. Watt and Richardson (2007) noticed this research often focused on intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivational factors, but there was inconsistency among individual researchers about what constituted each of those factors. Therefore, "in the absence of an agreed upon analytical and theoretical framework" (p. 168), they developed the FIT-Choice model to help explain motivational factors for teaching as a career choice. Their research was novel because it is grounded in the expectancy-value motivational model, a framework originally designed to help explain high school students' academic choices (Eccles, 1983). The expectancy-value model is based on the idea that students' academic choices are motivated by "success

expectancies and task valuation" (Watt and Richardson, 2007, p. 170). Because the researchers were able to conduct multiple large-scale studies to validate the FIT-Choice survey tool (Watt and Richardson, 2007, Watt et al., 2012), the FIT-Choice model is widely used.

The FIT-choice model (Figure 1) is presented as a progressive model that begins with prior teaching and learning experiences, social influences, and social dissuasion as precursory socialization influences. The next stage in the FIT-Choice model consists of task perceptions, self-perceptions, values, and fallback career. Because this model was designed for quantitative research, these motivational influences, some of which contain descriptive subfactors, are framed as relatively discrete. In this model, the final outcome of the various motivational influences is the choice of a teaching career.

Figure 1: FIT-Choice model, (Watt and Richardson, 2007)



Watt & Richardson's (2007) FIT-Choice model begins with prior teaching and learning experiences and social influences because research suggests people often choose to teach when they have had positive experiences in school or when people in their lives have encouraged them to teach. The social dissuasion factor acknowledges the impact of negative mass media images of teaching and how individuals are sometimes discouraged from pursuing teaching as a career choice by important people in their lives.

Next, "task perceptions," as a motivational influence includes the subfactors, "task demand" and "task return." Task demand refers to an individual's perceptions of both the expertise required to become a teacher and the energy required to persist in a teaching career. Task return refers to an individual's perceptions of teachers' social status, morale, and salary.

"Self-perceptions" refers to an individual's perceptions of their teaching ability. "Values" consists of two subfactors: “personal utility value” and “social utility value.” Personal utility value refers to whether an individual believes teaching provides job security, the option to work anywhere in the world, a desired amount of time with family, and is an option that "will permit low-effort exertion and a lifestyle that privileges an individual's concentration on extramural activities" (Watt & Richardson, 2007, p. 173). Social utility value describes an individual's desire to give back to society through teaching. More specifically, this subfactor calls attention to an individual's desire to "provide a service to society and make a worthwhile contribution," "benefit the socially disadvantaged and raise the ambitions of underprivileged youth" (Watt & Richardson, 2007, p. 173), help shape the next generation, and work with children. The final motivational influence to become a teacher, fallback career, refers to how an individual may pursue teaching because of their indecisiveness in choosing a career or inability to pursue their first career choice.

Teacher Motivation Theory Through a Critical Lens

Lortie's (1975/2020) five attractors to teaching have been used to create survey tools and analyze data on teaching as a career choice (Callahan & Brantlinger, 2023; Evans, 2011; Shipp, 1999; Spittle, 2014; Tomšik, 2019; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Although Lortie's research is race evasive, his notion of teaching as an "apprenticeship of observation" and at least three of Lortie's five attractors to teaching (interpersonal relationships, service, and material benefits) appear as themes in the limited literature on teaching as a career choice among Black students. In addition, the FIT-Choice survey tool has been used with high school students to understand their motivations for choosing teaching as a career choice (Fuchs et al., 2022; Leech et al., 2019), and the FIT-Choice theoretical model has been used to frame studies about high school students'

motivations to become a teacher (Chu, 2023; Han et al., 2018). Although the FIT-Choice scale was originally validated using data from pre-service teachers in Australia, at least three of its motivational influences, teaching/learning experiences, task perceptions, and social utility value are found in studies about Black high school students' decisions to become or not become a teacher. The next section will explicate the extent to which these teaching motivation frameworks are applicable to Black high school students. First, I will explain how my framework is attentive to Black students' racialized experiences in schools due to the impact of structural racism and anti-Blackness. Then I will address the impact of colorblind assumptions in research and the importance of counter-storytelling.

The Endemic Nature of Racism

Structural racism impacts the daily lives of Black students navigating the public P-12 school system in the US. For example, extant research has explored the ways standardized testing, academic tracking, curriculum, and discipline policies reproduce disadvantages for Black students (Burris & Welner, 2005; Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Leonardo, 2009). Furthermore, structural racism contributes to the systematic dismissal of Black teachers from the workforce, the disproportionately low number of so-called "qualified" Black teachers, and Black teachers' relatively high attrition rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fenwick, 2021; Fultz, 2004). In my study, participants balanced these realities as I asked them to consider a profession in an environment that has brought harm and reinforced the subordination of Black students and teachers in the US (Hope et al., 2015; Woodson, 1933).

According to Lortie's notion of teaching as an apprenticeship of observation, as Black students experience a teacher workforce that is currently 80% white, their view of the teaching profession is being primarily shaped by white models. Due to the impacts of structural racism in

teacher preparation curriculum and hiring practices, white teachers have often received teacher preparation steeped in deficit beliefs about Black students and their communities (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2017). Inadequate teacher preparation leads to unjust teaching practices. Therefore, although the FIT-Choice model asserts that prior teaching and learning experiences are motivations for students to become a teacher, many Black high school students explain their rejection of the teaching profession through stories about negative experiences with white teachers (Bianco et al., 2011; Chu, 2023; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Graham & Erwin, 2011; Marrun et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2004a). Summarized by one high achieving Black male student in Graham and Erwin's (2011) study, "I don't think Black men teach because how they get treated as students" (p. 407). This aligns with Lortie's (2020) idea that the interaction between students and teachers, "is not passive observation- it is usually a relationship which has consequences for the student and thus is invested with affect" (p. 61). Black students who understand the teaching profession through experiences with primarily white teachers may view the profession in ways that do not align with their possibilities as a future Black educator. Therefore, this study is rooted in the expectation that the endemic nature of racism impacts Black students' views of and decisions regarding teaching as a viable career path.

Anti-Blackness

The few studies on teaching as a career choice among Black high school students reveal that Black students experience anti-blackness in schools through their interactions with teachers (Bianco et al., 2011; Chu, 2023; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Graham & Erwin, 2011). For example, in their interviews with 22 Black male high school students enrolled in an urban education course, Goings and Bianco (2016) found "each student had a negative racialized encounter with a teacher" (p. 635). Furthermore, they found low expectations, stereotypes, and racial

microaggressions deterred these Black high school students from choosing teaching as a career path. Bianco et al. (2011) interviewed five midwestern Black male high school students enrolled in an urban education course about their experiences in school and found "all students reported experiencing racism throughout school with one or more White female teachers" (p. 375), citing use of the 'n' word and an instance of physical violence toward a Black student. Bianco et al. (2011) concluded that "although these particular Black male students did not specifically state that these experiences would either deter or encourage them to become teachers, it certainly had an effect on them" (p. 379). Additionally, Graham and Erwin (2011) found that the 63 high-achieving Black high school juniors in their focus group interviews "have a strong disdain for teaching because of the way teachers treat them," citing a student who plainly stated, "why would you want to become what you hate?" (p. 405). Furthermore, Graham and Erwin (2011) found that teachers who devalued the experiences of and labeled and stigmatized Black male students, and the potential for disrespect from white parents, if they chose to teach, were all reasons these high achieving Black male students viewed schools as oppressive institutions for Black people and did not plan to pursue teaching as a career.

Although qualitative research about teaching as a career choice among Black high school students is scant, these studies reveal similar themes regarding students' experiences with anti-blackness. When given the opportunity to speak about their views of the teaching profession, Black students described previous anti-black experiences and anti-black experiences they anticipated if they were to pursue teaching. Therefore, my study is rooted in the assumption that Black high school students view schools as sites of suffering for Black students, and their ongoing experiences with anti-blackness contribute to their views of the teaching profession. I

will attempt to understand how these views may lead students toward or away from pursuing teaching as a career.

Rejection of Colorblindness

My study is driven by the understanding that many foundational studies that theorize attractors to teaching are based on data that are not attentive to race. For example, Lortie (1975/2020) is not attentive to race when describing his sample and mentions race in only one sentence throughout his entire study on attractors to teaching. Lortie's (1975/2020) framework is an example of a colorblind or race-evasive majoritarian story "that privileges Whites… [as] normative points of reference" (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 28). For example, using white subjects as a point of reference, Lortie (2020) asserts, "if there are people who enter teaching because they wish to express negative sentiments through direct attack on conventional practice, they do not appear among the respondents in Five Towns; nor, in fact, are they evident in any studies I know of. If they do indeed exist they must be very scarce" (p. 46). Lortie's majoritarian assertion directly contradicts Black pre-service teachers who express a responsibility to uplift the Black community through education which disrupts the status quo (Su, 1996).

In addition, although Lortie (2020) and Watt and Richardson (2007) posit material benefits and social status are factors that may encourage an individual to become a teacher, high achieving Black high school students in Graham and Erwin's (2011) research referred to material benefits such as money and prestige when explaining the reasons teaching was not a viable career choice for them. It is important to note Graham and Erwin (2011) found, "while issues of low pay, social status, and gender emerged, more critical sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and sociocultural issues pervaded the minds of African American males as it relates to their perception of teaching as a career option" (p. 410). Therefore, these findings suggest data with

Black students may complicate and nuance understandings of colorblind teacher motivation frameworks. Furthermore, educational stakeholders who attempt to address the disproportionately low number of Black teachers and create pathways for Black students to become teachers must understand that colorblind solutions do not challenge racism and maintain a predominately white teacher workforce. My study rejects the notion of colorblindness and seeks to shed light on the ways historic and contemporary structural racism and whiteness in the school system may influence Black students' decision-making processes.

Counter-Storytelling

This study is grounded in the belief that Black students are experts on their own decision-making processes. Therefore, I rely on Black students' stories as rich data that provide insights into the reasons they do or do not pursue teaching as a viable career path. This study provides an alternative to research on teaching as a career that often generalizes the experiences of "minority students" (e.g., Su, 1996), normalizes the experiences of white students (e.g., Richardson & Watt, 2006), or retroactively applies the perspectives of Black in-service teachers to the recruitment of Black students (Dinkins & Thomas, 2016). For example, Lortie (2020) normalized the experiences of white teachers when he asserted that teaching may be more appealing than other youth focused, middle-class, deeply interpersonal professions (e.g., pediatrics) because "teaching provides the opportunity to work with children who are neither ill nor especially disadvantaged" (p. 27). Whereas, in Curci et al.'s (2023) study with high school students of color enrolled in a teacher preparation program, Black students expressed that their racial identity fueled a desire to work with disadvantaged Black students and act as cultural brokers for Black students who may need help navigating the school system due to structural racism. This is an important counter-narrative echoed by Black female pre-service teachers

(Mccray et al., 2002). In addition, although Lortie (2020) and Watt and Richardson (2007) posit material benefits and social status are factors influencing the choice to become a teacher, Bianco et al. (2011) found, "the attraction to helping young people and becoming agents of change seemed more important than pay" (p. 379) for several of the Black students enrolled in an urban education course. By privileging the counter-stories of Black students, an under-researched population with regard to teaching as a career choice, this study speaks back to majoritarian stories about the reasons Black students do or do not pursue teaching as a career path.

My framework combines factors from the FIT-Choice model and Lortie's attractors to teaching that are prevalent in career choice research with Black high school students. This framework uses CRT and BlackCrit to help understand how Black students' racialized experiences in high school, through an apprenticeship of observation, impact their views of the teaching profession and therefore their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career.

Teacher Motivation Framework Conclusions

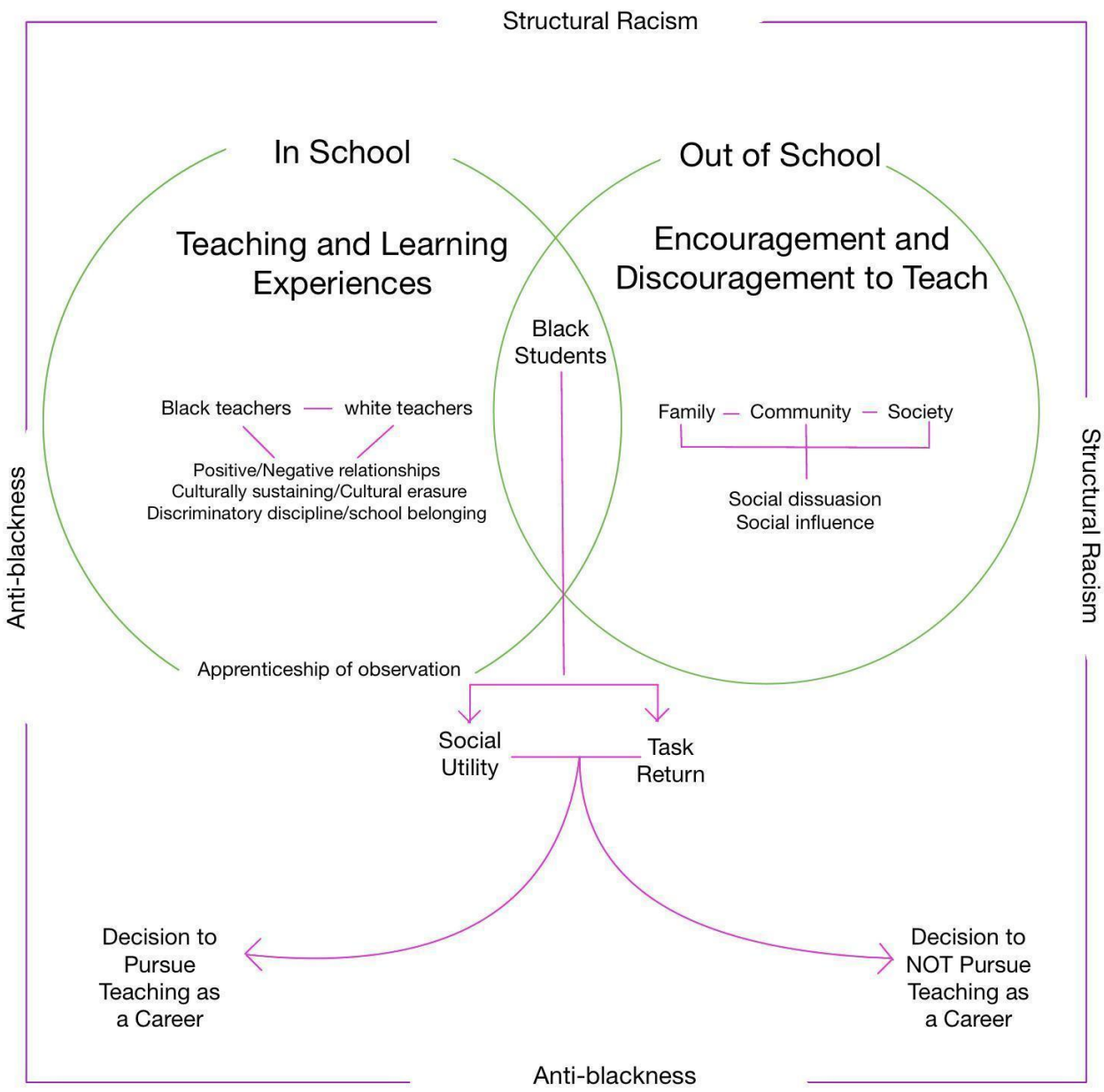
Teaching motivation frameworks help researchers uncover reasons prospective teachers are interested in the profession. These motivational factors inform programs and policies focused on bolstering the teacher pipeline. These frameworks, however, do not attend to differences in Black students' racialized experiences, as compared to their white peers. Therefore, for this study, these teacher motivation frameworks have been situated within the tenets and understandings of both Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit. The next section will explain these two theories in detail and how they might be used together to understand Black students' motivations toward and deterrents from the teaching profession.

A Conceptual Framework to Study Black High School Students' Attractors and Deterrents to Teaching

In this section, I discuss how the four theories described above might be combined to provide a strong and specific framework for studying Black high school students' perceptions of the factors that contribute to their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching and the extent to which their racialized experiences in schools impact their decision-making processes. Whereas the teaching motivation frameworks above are largely based on data from white participants, this framework draws on relevant components from each of the four theories to create a teaching choice framework that describes attractors to teaching found in studies with Black high school students. This framework can contribute to existing research on Black students' views of the teaching profession and how they might be motivated or dissuaded from teaching.

Figure 2 (below) shows how concepts from Lortie (2020) and Watt and Richardson (2007) can work together with CRT and BlackCrit to help researchers understand the reasons Black students do or do not want to teach. Unlike other models, this model does not always end with a student's decision to teach, but may also end with the decision to not teach. This framework can add to existing research by bringing attention to the interconnectedness between Black students' experiences in schools and their perceptions of the teaching profession.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework to Study Black High School Students' Attractors and Deterrents to Teaching



This framework is first situated within an environment in which anti-blackness and structural racism are endemic, as described by CRT and BlackCrit. Therefore, when Black students talk about their experiences, researchers must recognize how their experiences and perceptions are shaped by structural racism and anti-blackness. Furthermore, when conducting research with Black students, researchers must be careful to design studies that provide space for these students to speak back to dominant racist and anti-black narratives.

In this diagram, Black students are situated in the intersection between their in-school and out-of-school experiences, recognizing that structural racism and anti-blackness occur in both spaces. Students' in-school experiences are an "apprenticeship of observation," as they witness and experience both teaching and learning (Lortie, 2020). Unlike Watt and Richardson (2007), this model does not specify "prior" teaching and learning experiences, but instead considers these experiences to be part of high school students' past, present, and future. Black students observe and often share Black teachers' suffering, as result of structural racism and anti-Blackness, and may believe they will continue to experience such suffering if they choose to go into the school system as teachers (Stovall & Mosely, 2023). Said differently, Black people *be suffering* in schools, and Black students recognize this as part of their lived experiences.

In this model, teaching and learning experiences include experiences in schools with both Black and non-Black teachers. These experiences include their interpersonal relationships with teachers and other school personnel that have "consequences for the student and thus [are] invested with affect" (Lortie, 2020, p. 61). Teaching and learning experiences include students' experiences with curriculum, instruction, and school policy, as students learn, experientially, the structures and practices of the school system and profession they are contemplating. Finally, in-school experiences include Black students' exposure to and relationships with Black teachers. Lortie (2020) asserts some students make an early decision to teach because they identify with a particular teacher. Prior research shows that positive experiences with Black teachers motivate some Black students to teach, whereas lack of exposure to Black teachers discourages some Black students from teaching (Bianco et al., 2011; Goings and Bianco, 2016; Marrun et al., 2021). When attempting to understand Black high school students' experiences with teachers, researchers must be attentive to the race of the teachers with whom they interact.

Black students' out of school experiences include relationships with their family and community members and broader society. The factor called "encouragement and discouragement to teach" includes Watt and Richardson's (2007) notions of social dissuasion and social influence combined with Lortie's (2020) assertion that some students make an early decision to teach when significant others label them as having the qualities of a teacher. Social influence includes Black students' exposure to family members who are teachers and encourage them to teach. Social influence and social dissuasion also include positive and negative messages from mass media and the broader community regarding the teaching profession.

As they experience life in and out of school, Black high school students develop their own perceptions of the teaching profession and the extent to which they believe these perceptions align with their career goals. Students develop ideas about the social utility and task return of teaching. In this model, social utility combines Watt and Richardson's (2007) concept of social utility, as an individual's desire to uplift underprivileged youth and make a worthwhile contribution to society, and Lortie's (2020) service attractor to teaching. For Black high school students, social utility lies at the intersection of their belief in teaching as a service that uplifts the Black community and their desire to uplift the Black community through teaching. Students also develop their beliefs about the task returns of teaching as they align with their desired lifestyles. In this model, task return combines Watt and Richardson's (2007) teacher morale, social status, and salary with Lortie's (2020) emphasis on money, security, and prestige. The messages students receive about the teaching profession, in and out of school, determine their beliefs about the task return of teaching.

Finally, Black students weigh their teaching and learning experiences, encouragement and discouragement to teach, perceived social utility value of teaching, and perceived task return

on teaching when they make a decision to pursue or not pursue teaching. Whereas the FIT-Choice model ends with choosing teaching, my model ends with two possible decisions—choosing and not choosing teaching—recognizing there is no formula to predict how different experiences impact particular Black students. Some Black students have negative experiences in schools and decide they want to join the profession to bring about change, whereas similar experiences influence other students to decide teaching is not a viable career choice. This model is meant to provide researchers with a framework to understand the ways Black students' schooling experiences impact their choice to become a teacher. With this understanding, we might create more just experiences for all Black students, whether or not they decide to teach.

Conclusion: Implications of the Framework

This framework provides two important implications for future work with Black high school students. First, research in the field of teacher career choice is often focused on those who are currently pursuing or participating in the teaching profession. Consequently, reasons given in research for why people do not pursue teaching is often speculative rather than based on experiential knowledge. That is to say, if researchers want to understand the reasons Black youth do not choose to pursue a teaching career, they cannot adequately identify the attractors to teaching and then apply each contrapositive. For example, if researchers find Black students choose to teach because they want to uplift the Black community, that does not imply the contrapositive that Black students who do not want to teach do not have a desire to uplift the Black community. There is a great need for further research on the reasons Black students do not choose teaching independently from attractors to teaching. My model provides a framework for understanding the perspectives and experiences of students who will and will not pursue teaching.

In addition, this framework provides a guide for research with Black students. Current literature exploring reasons for choosing teaching as a career path is often based on data from white subjects without considering the unique experiences of Black students (e.g., Lortie, 2020; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Watt et al., 2012). Black students in the US move through the school system with different circumstances, concerns, and often in very different environments than most white students (Annamma et al., 2019; Caton, 2012; Gist et al., 2018). Importantly, Black students are educated in schools that are sites of anti-blackness and structural racism. As we make space for Black students to name their experiences, we must do so without assumptions of white normativity. This framework centers Black students' experiences and perceptions and how they impact their view of the teaching profession and their decisions about pursuing a K-12 teaching career.

Chapter 4: Methods

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of Black K-12 students' interest in pursuing the teaching profession. Specifically, this study examined the ways rural, Black, high school juniors' and seniors' schooling experiences influence their perceptions of teachers and teaching, and how those perceptions affect their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career path. Ultimately, I sought to provide in-depth data from Black youth that can inform effective solutions to the Black teacher shortage. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the K-12 experiences of rural, Black high school juniors and seniors influence their decisions to pursue or not pursue K-12 teaching as a career path?
    a. How do they describe their own schooling experiences, particularly as related to interactions with teachers, curriculum and instruction, and discipline?
    b. How do they describe and perceive the impact of race and racism on their schooling experiences and how do those perceptions impact their view of the teaching profession?
    c. In what ways do their prior schooling experiences and conceptualizations of teaching and teachers influence their decision to pursue or not pursue teaching?
2. How can study participants' experiences and understandings inform strategies for increasing the number of Black high school students who pursue K-12 teaching as a viable career path?

This chapter begins with an overview of the research design, followed by a description of the study context, participants, and recruitment strategies. Next, I explain the data sources, data

analysis process, and methods for validation. Finally, I describe procedures to obtain consent, ensure confidentiality, and minimize risk for participants.

Research Design

To explore the effect of rural, Black students' experiences in K-12 schools on their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career, I implemented a qualitative research design using data from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and a digital collage. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), "qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*; that is, how people make sense of the world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 15). This study is exploratory in nature, seeking to illuminate Black students' experiences and understand "the 'how' and 'why' of systems and human behavior and what governs these behaviors" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016, p. 141).

This study created space for students to share K-12 schooling experiences they deemed meaningful to their perceptions of teachers and teaching. There is very little research on the Black teacher pipeline that centers the voices of Black K-12 students. Therefore, this project elevates Black students' experiences and perceptions to "challenge the status quo and push toward the goal of social justice" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). They had the opportunity to explain the impact of their experiences on their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career path. Qualitative methods allowed me to capture rich descriptions of participants' decision-making processes and interpretations of their experiences. This study has the important goal of understanding participants' experience from their own perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My qualitative research process relied on data gathered from participants to help me build theory about Black high school students' interests in the teaching profession. I combined

information from individual and focus group interviews and artifacts, through the lens of BlackCrit and CRT, to develop themes relevant to Black students' decision-making processes. In alignment with Critical Race theorists, this study presupposes that the normalization of White, majoritarian perspectives on racial issues present obstacles to recruiting Black people into K-12 teaching (Delgado & Stefanic, 1993). Many teacher recruitment and teacher motivation studies use data gathered from non-Black participants to make generalizations about all high school students' motivations and barriers to teaching (Auguste et al., 2010; Austin & Miksza, 2012; Fuchs et al., 2022). In contrast, this study specifically focused on the stories of Black high school juniors and seniors, understanding that they are experts on their experiences and are uniquely positioned to provide the most relevant insights into why they may or may not consider a career in K-12 teaching.

Study Setting

Participants for this study were enrolled in public high schools in a rural region of a mid-Atlantic state. This region consists of two neighboring counties, each with their own school district: District 1 and District 2. This region was chosen as the site for the proposed study because of the unique location, economy, and racial demographics. In the next section I describe the region and two school districts on which this study focuses.

This rural region covers approximately 1,011 square miles with a total population of approximately 128,498 people. The unemployment rate in this region is above the state average and the percentage of adults holding a bachelor's degree is well below the state average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Politically, this region has consistently favored Republican over Democratic nominees during the entirety of the study participants' lifetimes. Located over 100 miles from any major metropolitan area, the most dominant industry in this region is agriculture.

Similar to other regions in the southern US that historically relied on agriculture, many Black residents have multi-generational roots in this region that began with enslavement (Brockenbrough, 2018). Furthermore, the distance from any major metropolitan area has created an economy that is strongly supported by family-owned businesses. However, due to enslavement and legalized economic and residential discrimination for most of this country's history, generational wealth and economic opportunity has disproportionately been passed down through white family-owned businesses. While these circumstances have produced cycles of wealth and opportunity for many white residents, the combination of rurality and ongoing racial discrimination has resulted in a lack of jobs available in this region that provide opportunities for Black residents to elevate their social class (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

In District 1, Black residents comprise 40.8% of the total population compared to white (non-Hispanic) people who are 51.3% of the total population. In District 2, Black residents comprise 28% of the total population compared to white (non-Hispanic) people who are 59.2% of the total population. Black residents in these districts are a very large minority population, however this is not reflected in the proportion of Black teachers employed compared to their white counterparts. Furthermore, in District 1, all five school board members are white and the 2024 board-appointed Superintendent is a Black female from a different region. Of the seven elected school board members in District 2, six are white and five are graduates of District 2 high schools. Currently, in each of the two school districts on which this study focuses, Black students comprise 46% (District 1) and 37% (District 2) of the overall student populations. Of the 24 school districts in the state, these districts have the 4th and 7th highest percentage of Black students despite their distance from any major urban area. Most importantly, the difference

between the percentage of students and teachers who are Black for District 1 and District 2 are 35% and 30%, respectively—the largest discrepancies among all school districts in the state.

I chose this rural region for my study because Black rural students are under-researched in teacher pipeline studies. Furthermore, rural areas have vastly different economies than urban areas, creating different opportunities and expectations for Black students post-high school. Gagnon & Mattingly (2015) assert "size, isolation, and distance from human capital create a unique context for rural schools that necessitates tailored solutions" (p. 3). Furthermore, these districts stood out as appropriate locations for this study because of their relatively low number of Black teachers in proportion to the number of Black students. Because Black teachers are 11% of the K-12 teacher workforce in District 1 and 7% in District 2 (WCPS, 2024; SCPS, 2023), the large number of Black students in these districts have little to no access to Black teachers as an example or model to whom they could aspire. Given prior research which shows Black teachers have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of Black students (Brockenbrough, 2018; Gershenson, et al., 2016, Grissom et al., 2017), data related to Black rural students who have schooling experiences with primarily white teachers will provide further insight into the Black teacher pipeline.

Participants and Recruitment

This study includes six Black high school juniors and seniors from District 1 and District 2 (see Table 1); they were all 17 or 18 years old. Each of the participants indicated a previous or current interest in the teaching profession. Three had decided to pursue teaching, and three decided to pursue other careers, which provided insight into deterrents from teaching for students who would otherwise be interested. In addition, the three students who decided to pursue teaching had between two and three years of experience in a high school teacher preparation

program. Focusing on six students allowed me to collect in-depth data and compare participants' experiences and perspectives. I focused on Black rural students because they are an underrepresented population in Black teacher pipeline research. Due to the prominent racial mismatch between Black students and teachers in the districts of focus, study participants had very little experience with Black classroom teachers, which is an issue of interest in this study. I focused on juniors and seniors because, compared to students in lower grades, they have more experience in the K-12 school system and are actively considering and/or preparing for their future careers. Furthermore, this study recruited participants who have been in the public school system in this region since elementary school to help ensure they had similar schooling experiences.

Table 1

Name	Age; grade	Sex	District	High school	College plans?	# of K-12 Black teachers	Future career
Ahlayah	17; jr	M	1	Obama	Yes	6	Math **Teacher**
Tiffany	17; sr	F	2	Biden	Yes, accepted	2	Early Childhood **Teacher**
Joe	17; jr	M	1	Obama	Yes	3	History **Teacher**, Div 1 basketball referee
Bria	18; sr	F	1	Obama	Yes, accepted	2	Pharmaceutical science
Britney	17; sr	F	2	Carter	Yes, accepted	3	Criminal justice; Special agent
Devin	17; jr	M	2	Carter	Yes	2	Sports broadcasting

I recruited participants for this study through convenience and snowball sampling. I drew on my personal relationships with eligible youth in the two districts and contacted eligible youths through community members and organizations, social media, email, and texts. I asked my personal contacts and youth who agreed to participate to forward a flyer (APPENDIX A) about the study to potential participants. The flyer included a link to an eligibility survey to ensure students met the sample criteria before I invited them to join the study.

Data Collection

This study relies on data from two semi-structured individual interviews, one focus group interview, and two artifacts from each of the six participants. The goal of the study is not to generalize the experiences of Black students who live in a rural setting but to understand these students' experiences and how their experiences relate to existing research on the Black teacher pipeline. I collected data in four stages: (1) a preliminary individual interview, (2) a focus group interview during which participants individually constructed a virtual artifact, (3) an individual creation of a digital visual artifact, and (4) an individual follow-up interview.

First Individual Interview

First, I conducted an individual semi-structured Zoom interview with each participant. These interviews lasted an average of 42 minutes. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for dialogue and create space for participants to discuss issues, not reflected in the interview protocol, that were important to them. One purpose of this interview was to build trust and rapport with each participant so they would feel more comfortable sharing experiences rooted in racism. Since this was my first time meeting each student, I was intentional about naming race and racism when sharing about my experiences, so participants might feel comfortable doing the same when necessary. Another purpose of this interview was to gather

demographic information relevant to the study and preliminary data about participants' views of the teaching profession. For example, I asked each participant about their personal experiences with curriculum and discipline, the extent and nature of their contact with Black teachers, and their general interest in the teaching profession (SEE APPENDIX B). At the beginning of each interview, I immediately asked participants to change their name on Zoom to their chosen pseudonym for this study, then each interview was audio recorded. Following each interview, the recording was transcribed and sent to the participant to check for accuracy. In addition, I wrote memos after each interview to reflect on what I was learning during the data collection phase.

Focus Group Discussion

Following the preliminary interviews, all study participants engaged in one of two semi-structured focus group interviews on Zoom. These focus groups lasted from one to two hours. Each group consisted of three participants from two different schools. The focus groups were used to create a safe space for Black students who have many similar and shared experiences, even experiences of pain and injustice. The focus group discussion was approached as a "kitchen table" talk (Haddix et al., 2016). In Black communities, the kitchen table is "a communal place, a place of transformation, a place of reconciliation, a place to be truly vulnerable and to expose our most vulnerable spaces" (Bolding et al., 2022, p. 10). Unlike traditional focus groups, I began cultivating our kitchen table through ongoing conversations, through text messaging, with each of the participants prior to the focus group meetings. After beginning to build trust and rapport during the preliminary interview, I used text messaging to maintain conversations with each of the participants about their daily experiences with sports, school, work, and college. I checked in on their well-being and demonstrated to them that I could be a trusted adult through consistency and care. During the focus group meeting, the session began with introductions and an agreement

on group norms. Next, following the example of Graham and Erwin (2011), participants created and explained individual “circle maps" about teachers. In the circle map, participants were asked to populate a diagram (APPENDIX C) by first providing, inside the circle, words or phrases that came to mind when they thought of the phrase “classroom teacher.” Next, inside the rectangle, they explained why they chose the words and phrases in the circle. Finally, participants were asked to identify which of the words/phrases in the circle are positive, negative, or neutral. After creating the maps, participants were given the opportunity to share their circle maps and comment or ask questions about other students’ maps. Sharing their maps allowed students to begin to create a kitchen table space around similar experiences and perceptions of teachers, with attention to race and other negative aspects of their schooling experiences they may not have felt comfortable sharing in the presence of white individuals. As participants shared their experiences, the kitchen table served as a space where, “the invisible becomes visible as single stories are realized as a collective experience” (DeShay-Duncan, 2020, p. 1). After this activity, I began a kitchen table talk centered around participants’ experiences in schools, their perceptions of teachers and teaching, and their understandings of the need for and importance of Black teachers in K-12 schools (SEE APPENDIX D). I participated in their conversations through encouragement, such as head nods and exclamations like, “I see you,” and validation of the harm they may have experienced, through head shakes and exclamations like, “Whew chile.” As a trusted adult, my encouragement and validation served to transform the space between researcher and participants into a more familial space between kinfolk. Each kitchen table talk was audio recorded on Zoom.

Digital Collage

Following the focus group discussions, participants created a digital collage representing what they imagined they would be like as a teacher. Participants were given one week to complete the collage on their own, using any digital application. The digital collage is a form of data that goes beyond words and captures participants' feelings, deepening the researcher's understanding of how participants are making sense of their world. Participants used the prompt in Appendix E to create the digital collage. During the second individual interview, these collages served as a prompt for further discussion about participants' views of the teaching profession.

Second Individual Interview

The final stage of data collection included a second semi-structured individual interview with each participant, on Zoom. These interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes. Before this round of interviews, I refined interview questions based on responses from previous stages. The purpose of this interview was to clarify anything participants said in the previous interviews, give them the opportunity to share new ideas after reflecting on the focus group discussion, and to deepen my understanding of participants' engagement with previous findings regarding the Black teacher pipeline (SEE APPENDIX F). This interview began with participants' reflection on the focus group interview. Then, participants explained and described each aspect of their digital collage. I asked them to verbalize why they chose each piece of media including any experiences that influenced their choices. Furthermore, participants' specificity to detail (or lack thereof) allowed them to be realistic about the extent to which they were able to imagine themselves in the role of a teacher, prompting further discussion later. Next, I gave participants time to complete a Google Form questionnaire (APPENDIX G) created after the second round of interviews. The questionnaire contained likert-scale and multiple-choice questions centered

around participant demographics, potential barriers to teaching, and school climate, with an opportunity for students to expand on each answer using a text box. The next part of the interview addressed previous findings in Black teacher pipeline research. For example, Black high school students in Bianco et al.'s (2011) research reported that encouragement from a high school teacher was the most influential factor in them choosing teaching as a career. Therefore, participants were asked about how they were encouraged to or discouraged from joining the teaching profession. Finally, participants were asked if they would like to clarify, correct, or expand on anything in the transcripts from their previous interviews.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that the process of "data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic" (p. 195); therefore, I analyzed study data both during and after the collection phase. The circle map, digital collage, and questionnaire were used to prompt conversation and gauge my impressions, they were not formally analyzed. During the first phase of analysis, audio files of each interview were transcribed verbatim into a text file by a transcribing program, OtterAi. I uploaded the interview transcripts into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package used to organize, code, and retrieve data. I read all transcriptions while listening to the original audio files to ensure accuracy. Furthermore, while reading their transcripts, I created analytic memos, organized according to participant, to keep track of consistencies within individual participants' data as well as similarities and differences between participants. I also maintained a log with pseudonyms for each participant as well as the schools, districts, and school personnel named during the interviews.

My first NVivo coding cycle began with descriptive codes to identify demographic data and circumstances in participants' lives (e.g., the number of Black teachers they had, whether

they have a family member who teaches). Next, I used a preliminary set of deductive codes (SEE APPENDIX H) based on the literature review, theoretical framework, and research questions. For example, I coded for concepts in my framework such as perceptions of racism and anti-Blackness, encouragement and discouragement from adults, and financial concerns. Then, I coded the data inductively for participants' experiences with teachers, experiences in schools, perceptions of the teaching profession, decision making processes (regarding choosing teaching as a future career), and suggestions for recruitment into teaching. I also coded inductively to identify other data that appeared significant to the participants and to my research questions but were not captured in my previous coding cycles.

During the second round of analysis, I analyzed the coded data to identify patterns in perceptions and experiences, within and across participants' data, which I organized into categories. For example, one category contained instances of Black teachers experiencing harm. Then, I organized the categories into larger themes that helped me to understand participants' experiences in schools and how those experiences impacted their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching (e.g. Witnessing and experiencing anti-Black harm in schools). Throughout this process, I carefully considered my own biases to ensure that I did not impose my own experiences on participants' accounts (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher Positionality and Validity

As I engage in this study, I carry the lessons learned from my experiences during my nine years as a secondary mathematics educator in District 2. During my time teaching at Carter High School, students often shared that I was their first Black teacher. As a Black woman teacher, many Black students looked to me as a mother figure and advocate during the school day. As a coworker, I witnessed racist conversations, policy implementation, disciplinary actions, and

expectations by white teachers, targeted at Black students. Black students often confided in me their frustrations and concerns with inequitable treatment from their white teachers. I come to this study carrying the stories of students who I have taught, to amplify the voices of current students and bring about a clearer understanding of the ways Black students' experiences in schools impact their decisions to choose or not choose teaching as a career.

Understanding that in qualitative research the researcher acts as the data gathering tool, the validity of this study relies on the extent to which I actively reflect on how my potential biases may shape my interpretations of the data (Golafshani, 2003). Maxwell (2012) provides three steps which I took to ensure the validity of my conclusions. I collected rich data, provided respondent validation, and triangulated the data.

This study used multiple forms of data and ways for participants to express their perceptions to provide a full picture of the ways their experiences impacted their decisions to teach. Further, the open-ended questions in the individual interviews and focus group discussion gave participants the opportunity to fully explain and make sense of their experiences.

I provided respondent validation by asking students to review the data and my conclusions at multiple stages during the study. When students created their circle maps, I asked them to mark their perceptions of a classroom teacher as positive, negative, or neutral to ensure I did not interpret their perceptions based on my own assumptions. For example, I did not want to infer whether the participant who labeled teachers as being "assertive" was using that term as a positive or negative attribute. Furthermore, after the individual interviews were transcribed, I sent them to the participants to read and make sure their thoughts were captured accurately. All participants confirmed the transcriptions captured their thoughts accurately. Finally, after I

analyzed the data, I sent my conclusions to the students as a PowerPoint presentation to solicit their feedback.

Finally, I triangulated the multiple data sources I collected throughout the study. For example, I looked for similarities and differences in perceptions of teachers both within and across participants' individual interviews, the focus group, and artifact data. In addition, I was able to look for similarities and differences among students according to demographic criteria, such as their commitment to becoming a teacher, having a family member who teaches, or whether they experienced a Black teacher during high school. Furthermore, the participants in the study come from different schools and districts in the region, which enabled me to compare their experiences although they had different teachers and attended different schools.

Participant Consent and Confidentiality

The consent process took place prior to any identifiable data collection. Prospective participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study, how the data would be used, any possible risks, and what would be expected of them if they gave consent. I obtained informed, voluntary consent from all participants through an assent form written in standard American English (SEE APPENDIX I) for participants under 18 or a consent form (SEE APPENDIX J) for students 18 and over. For students under the age of 18, I also obtained consent from their parent(s) through a consent form written in standard American English (SEE APPENDIX K). All participants and parents (as appropriate) received a digital copy of the consent/assent form for their own records. Participants were encouraged to ask me questions about their engagement in the research throughout the study and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, participants chose a pseudonym during the initial interview, which was used on all documents related to this study. I assured participants that conversations would be held in confidentiality and would not be shared with parents, teachers, or other school personnel. All names of schools, teachers, or other individuals or locales were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure comments and quotes cannot be traced back to the participants. All study data are stored on a private, password-protected computer and in the university secure BOX system. Only I have access to the data collected.

Risks and Benefits

It was important for me to be sure the participants were both comfortable and honest in their responses, especially because the interview questions addressed topics that could cause them to feel anxiety or uneasiness or recount traumatic experiences. For example, most participants chose to share instances of injustice experienced during school and from teachers. Participants brought up difficult and painful memories, including of racism, that they encountered during their K-12 schooling. Therefore, I first established rapport with the participants, ensuring them that their experiences are valid and would contribute to knowledge in this field of research. I also made it clear that they were allowed to turn off their camera at any time during the interviews and focus group discussions or refrain from answering any question that made them uncomfortable. All participants had the opportunity to review and modify their interview transcriptions, reducing the level or risk of stress on their part. Finally, as stated earlier, participants were informed that they could ask questions throughout the study and withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

This study has two potential benefits to the participants. First, it is my hope that giving these Black students the space to talk about their experiences through a focus group created a

“kitchen table” space for them to reflect on their racialized experiences, absent of the white gaze. Haddix et al. (2016) describe kitchen table talk, "as a reflection of our collective desire to transform spaces by sharing our experiences and asserting our voices" (p. 381). This space was meant to provide healing, affirmation, and/or hope for participants through shared experience. Second, students were compensated monetarily for their participation in this study. They were each given a $25 gift card for every stage of the study they completed.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the various data sources, methods, and analysis processes I used to conduct my study. I also contextualized the study by providing relevant data describing the study setting. Then, I highlighted my positionality in relation to the study and risks and benefits for the participants. In the next chapter, I describe findings related to participants' experiences in schools.

Chapter 5: Findings (1)

This chapter presents study findings from twelve individual interviews and two focus group interviews with six Black, rural, high school students in a Mid-Atlantic state. The findings in this chapter focus on the ways these participants' local environment and in-school experiences have shaped their understandings of teachers and the teaching profession. These findings are separated into three parts. The first explores the implications of being a Black student in a predominantly white, rural setting. The second part illuminates participants' experiences of interpersonal and institutional harm in schools. The last part draws attention to relationships between participants' experiences in schools and their perceptions of the teaching profession.

On being a Black student in a predominantly white space

"It's a hostile cultural divide in the school system as well. In the teaching part and the students part as well just because there was already more white teachers after the end of, you know, segregation and how all those black teachers got fired" -Joe

The six participants in this study are Black juniors and seniors who lived in neighboring districts, District 1 and District 2, in a rural region of a Mid-Atlantic state. Three students (Ahlayah, Joe, and Bria) attended Obama High school with a student population that was 55% Black and 28% white, two students (Devin and Britney) attended Carter High school with a student population that was 35% Black and 39% white, and one student (Tiffany) attended Biden High school which had a student population that was 30% Black and 50% white.

As Tieken and Montgomery (2021) describe, "In many contexts, rural schools mirror the surrounding area’s racial and class segregation. In these places, schools can divide communities and limit opportunities" (p. 9). Participants like Joe in the quote above noticed, "a hostile cultural divide in the school system," and shared stories illuminating their knowledge of racial disparities in their school environments. For example, these participants, who attended schools with large

white student populations, were acutely aware of differences between how Black and white students were treated by teachers and administrators in their schools. Whereas Black students who attend schools with very few white students may not be able to directly compare the way white teachers treat Black students to the way they treat white students, the Black students in this study witness this dissonance first-hand. They were also able to report the ways white students were perceived by teachers and administrators and the impact white parents had on the daily administration of their schools. Furthermore, when participants described their racialized experiences, it became clear that they did not have many spaces to verbalize and make sense of the anti-Blackness and systemic racism they observed in school and with school staff.

On being a Black student in proximity to whiteness

Participants in this study often found themselves navigating their school environments surrounded by white people. They had majority white classmates, teachers, teammates, and administrators. This fact was true throughout the entirety of their K-12 experiences. When I asked participants to reflect on their twelve years of schooling, they often told stories illuminating differences between their experiences and the experiences of their white peers. They witnessed treatment of both Black and white students by white school leaders and concluded that Black and white students are not treated the same. These participants were making sense of the impact of being a Black student who is navigating a rural school, led by white people, with a large white population. This section is a re-telling of their lived and witnessed experiences, as well as the ways they made sense of these experiences, in their own words.

Devin, an officer in the Student Government Association (SGA), recounted an experience when he was stopped by a white teacher in the hallway as he was heading to an SGA activity,

> I'm being energetic and positive, and they're [white teacher] just like, giving me this bad look like, 'okay, you can go, I guess.' I'm just like, well, why is it like that? But then I seen my white peer, and they didn't have no interruptions walking down the hall at all.

In this story, Devin described experiencing unfair treatment and then immediately afterward witnessing a white peer receive favorable treatment right in front of him. This is consistent with Britney's comparison of how Black and white students were perceived and treated. Britney, a student enrolled in multiple AP classes in which she was one of very few Black students, stated, "Black students are generalized and assumed to be 'bad kids,' while white kids are often praised." Further, Joe observed that this differential treatment allowed white students to exhibit negative behavior without consequence. He explained, "so usually what will happen is certain kids will have certain, I would say, privileged behavior, and they'll think that they could get away with stuff like bullying and whatnot, um, pretty much oppression." Participants not only noticed their unfair treatment, but they also understood it in racialized terms as they actively witnessed white students receiving the treatment Black students also deserve. The data suggest that the deference given to white students was connected to the influence of their parents on the daily functioning of the school.

Participants witnessed white parents' impact on the day-to-day operations in their schools, especially concerning white students' interpersonal relationships with teachers and white parents intervening when their students had been disciplined in school. Participants explained that white parents and school staff had relationships outside of the school building that impacted how students were treated in schools. For example, Tiffany explained,

> What I've noticed is my teachers already knowing my classmates' parents or they've known the students since they were a kid… They already have that relationship with each

> other, and I think it influences how they act with these white students compared to Black students.

Furthermore, Black students in this study witnessed white parents successfully advocating for their children to receive less harsh punishments or, in some cases, no punishment at all. At the same time, they were aware that Black parents' advocacy did not garner the same results. For example, Ahlayah shared,

> Admin [administrators] in our school are threatened easily. They don't mess with kids who have white parents because they assume that they have more money and could sue. When white parents come into the school and cuss out the teachers, the admin do nothing to interfere or help the teachers out.

Similarly, Joe described now he observed a white parent and a Black parent each advocating for their child, and concluded, "white children are given more privileges than Black children based off of the parenting." Joe used the phrase "the parenting" to refer to the race of the parent, and he pointed out how white parents receive preferential treatment compared to Black parents when they advocate for their children. Joe further explained,

> A white kid at our school didn't agree with the dress code and his parents cussed out the administrator, receiving a pass to where they never have to wear uniform…A Black student had the same issue, and his parents cussed out the administrator, but he was suspended.

These Black students were making sense of the impact of attending school with a majority white student population in a rural town where white parents were often personally acquainted with and supported by white school personnel. Data indicate that this was not the case with Black parents and that the racially disparate ways in which white staff treated parents was

reflected in how they treated students. Participants illuminated how they witnessed white students receiving favorable treatment from white teachers and administrators compared to Black students. For example, participants brought attention to teachers' assumptions of innocence for white students in contrast to assumptions of wrongdoing for Black students in their schools. Participants also shared their experiences with the effects of white students' interpersonal relationships with white teachers and white parents' successful interventions when their students were disciplined in school.

On Black students processing racism

Black students in majority white spaces may come to expect racism and anti-Blackness as part of their everyday experiences (Dumas, 2016). However, although participants recognized racism and anti-Blackness in their everyday experiences, they made sense of these experiences without much, if any, guidance from Black teachers or Black affinity spaces. In this section, I focus on how participants attempted to rationalize or make sense of the impact of race and racism on their experiences in schools and with teachers and white peers.

In trying to make sense of the reason white students in his district were racist, Joe explained it as a natural consequence of having few Black teachers, stating,

> When that certain student who went to school with maybe two Black teachers and maybe three Black kids in the entire school grows up, all of a sudden, well, not all of a sudden, but they hate colored people. I can't really, I don't want to blame them for the lack of diversity in their time growing up and being educated.

Joe reasoned that their racism was due to a lack of diversity in their schooling. Joe further explained, "the white kids might be a little bit racist. Well, in a way, I can't really blame them, because they also undergo the exact same thing that Black students undergo: the lack of diversity

in the teaching position." Joe had come to expect racism from his white peers and did not want to "blame" them or white adults for continuing to uphold racist beliefs and practices. Furthermore, he appeared to have used the phrase, "might be a little bit racist," so he was not criticized for directly accusing his white peers of being racist. In my experience as a Black resident and classroom teacher in this region, avoiding criticism by using an indirect phrase is a survival tactic among Black people to protect themselves from backlash that might develop as a result of accusing a white person of racism.

As Joe and other study participants shared their stories, I noticed a consistent tension between their experiences of racism and notions of colorblindness in the schools that made them reluctant to name anti-Black racism when describing their experiences. For example, after describing non-Black teachers who "assert dominance" over Black students, Ahlayah explained,

> I feel like with non-Black teachers...I don't know if it's how they've been raised. If it's like, a sort of, 'I don't know what world you come from, but you're going to have to adjust to my way of living.' Maybe it's a sort of closed mindedness and not being able to want to see another point of view. I'm not trying to say all of my teachers were racist. I'm not saying that at all…

After trying to make sense of the impact of non-Black teachers' excessive assertions of dominance over Black students, Ahlayah felt the need to immediately clarify that he was not calling his teachers racist. Ahlayah's immediate and unprompted assertion is an example of how Black people in white spaces choose their wording carefully to protect themselves against potential white backlash resulting from white fragility (Richard & Cameron, 2025). Britney said something similar when describing a white teacher she did not like, explaining, "I don't want to say that he's racist, because that is a heavy claim to make, but he did mistreat a lot of his Black

students." Further, Britney told the story of an incident in which she was ordered to be searched for drugs by an administrator without cause. Instead of naming the people involved as simply Black and white, Britney said,

> Me and one of my friends, *who also happened to be Black*, were in the bathroom together, and we walked out of the stall at the same time, and one of the admin that was in there was like, “I'm sending you both to admin so that you can get searched” … And the woman who sent us to admin in the first place *did happen to be a white woman.* (italics added)

In this re-telling, Britney made the choice to acknowledge race without directly implying the presence of racism by stating that the people involved in the situation "happen to be" Black and white. This choice of wording implies that she understood that race played a role in this incident, but was hesitant to call the incident racist. Britney shared another story about a white teacher with whom she had a bad experience, stating,

> She definitely had a little bit of prejudice towards me, like she would get me and the only other Black girl in my class confused…she would do it on purpose, and then when we would correct her, she'd be like, 'Oh, well, it doesn't even matter.' And then she'd walk away and be in her own world. So, I don't know if that was as big of a deal as it was to me.

In recounting this incident, Britney downplayed this microaggression, calling it "a little bit of prejudice" and questioned whether or not it was "a big deal" because of the white teacher's indifference toward the situation. Britney and the other participants in this study often shied away from overtly identifying their experiences or their teachers as 'racist.' Black students who are subject to mostly white teachers and school leaders may not have space to explain or make

sense of the ways race and racism show up in their experiences at school. This can cause Black students to doubt the racism and inequity they have seen, felt, and experienced.

The Black students in this study witnessed and experienced differential treatment of white and Black students by their school staff. Whereas Black teachers often, "directly and explicitly broach the topic of race and racism with their students," (Duncan, 2020, p. 4) the absence of Black teachers and leaders left some participants unable to safely talk about their experiences of inequality with trusted adults in their schools. During our interviews, it became obvious that some participants never got the opportunity to receive validation nor explore the implications of their racialized experiences. For example, at the conclusion of our first interview, Britney exclaimed, "I feel like I said a whole lot that I feel like I've needed to say for a few years now," expressing deep relief after sharing her experiences of racialized trauma in school. At the conclusion of the interview process, Devin also emphasized the value of having this space to talk about racialized experiences, stating,

> Doing this couple interviews with you, and also hearing like the other people in the group, hearing how they think, how they view, knowing that this is a safe space, you know, it just makes me consider things and look at things differently.

It is also important to note that both Devin and Britney participated in a Black Affinity club at their school that had recently been opened up to non-Black students. When I asked Devin about this decision to extend participation in the Black Affinity club to white students and non-Black students of color, he explained, "It had firstly started for the Black community to have a safe space within the school building" but white and other non-Black students showed interest in joining the club. Devin reasoned, "you don't want to kind of go back to segregation and stuff like that. You know, saying, ‘Oh, you can't join because you're not Black.’ Because, like you feel me,

ultimately, that's wrong to say." His explanation illuminated his understanding of the importance of Black students having safe spaces in schools and how he experienced and made sense of white students being part of that Black affinity space.

Summary

The Black high school students in this study shared their experiences with teachers and administrators who treated Black students differently and more poorly than their white peers. They described disparate treatment that came in the form of assumptions of guilt or wrongdoing among Black students compared to their white peers who were assumed to be innocent. Furthermore, due to living in small, rural, towns, participants noticed the disproportionate impact white parents had on the daily governance of their schools compared to Black parents. For example, they described preferential treatment given to white students when white parents successfully intervened on school discipline policies and when white parents had personal relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, this visible discrepancy between how Black and white students are treated may have compounded the psychological harm on participants because the visibility of inequality can cause more frustration for those who are disadvantaged than if it were invisible (Decelles & Norton, 2016). Although participants bore witness to this differential treatment, because they attended predominantly white schools or schools being led by white school staff, they did not have safe places at school to name, process, and make sense of their experiences with anti-Blackness and racism. Just as in the aftermath of legalized slavery when Black individuals were not free to speak ill of white folks or the harm they caused, in the "afterlife of school segregation" (ross, 2021, p. 48), as participants navigated desegregated schools with white leaders and white students they did not feel free to critique racism and anti-Blackness in their so-called equal educational experiences. In this way, whiteness in schools can

silence Black students' critique of racism and anti-Blackness, necessitating alternative, fugitive spaces (ross, 2021) for Black students to safely and confidently share their stories.

On witnessed and experienced harm in school

Participants in this study reported having between two and six Black teachers throughout their K-12 education and three participants, Joe, Bria, and Devin, reported having no Black teachers during high school. Therefore, most of their experiences and those of their peers were based on interactions with white teachers. Since students often spend about half their waking hours every day in school, the way Black students are treated, specifically by their white teachers, can have an impact on their lives.

Participants all boasted of GPAs above 3.5, participation in AP and Honors classes, and no incidents of exclusionary discipline. Even as they may be considered model students, they witnessed and experienced anti-Black psychological and emotional harm throughout their K-12 education through microaggressions, unfair discipline, and white teachers asserting dominance over Black students. Participants also witnessed their Black teachers' experiencing psychological harm from white parents and unfair treatment from school administrators. Finally, they shared the belief that some white teachers are not prepared to effectively engage Black students in the classroom.

On experienced/witnessed anti-Black racism and teachers' poor relationships with Black students

When asked on the questionnaire to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement "Black and white students are treated the same" by teachers and administrators at their school, four participants disagreed, one participant strongly disagreed, and one student, Devin,

was neutral; he reported, "I feel as the teachers are mostly fair and don't view students by the color of their skin. But I have heard situations from my peers that may seem motivated by the color of their skin." In alignment with responses on the questionnaire, participants in this study shared personal experiences of racism and interactions they witnessed between their Black peers and white school staff in the form of microaggressions, hyper-surveillance, and white teachers' unnecessary assertions of dominance.

Microaggressions are often subtle or indirect interactions or behaviors that communicate discrimination or bias toward a marginalized group (Frank et al., 2021). As one example, Britney shared that her white male teacher would try to joke with Black students in a way she found disrespectful. She explained, "he would make comments like, 'I just don't understand how you get your hair to grow like that overnight,'" referring to her overnight change from a silkpress bob to knotless braids. Like many Black girls who connect their hair to their identity (Delongoria, 2018), Britney did not think a "joke" about the innovative ways Black people change hairstyles was funny especially as she was forced to endure the teacher's probing, "it's fake. It's not your real hair," in front of a class with very few Black students. Britney also recalled a separate incident in which a white female teacher made a "joke" about the Black Affinity club during a fundraiser. She explained,

> She's like, 'I didn't know we had that.' And I was like 'Yeah,' and she's like, 'Has anyone ever tried to start a White Affinity club?' And she laughed… I'm just sitting there, like everyone at the table was gagged, like, jaw dropped.

Although Britney and her peers were left speechless (gagged), they did not complain or confront this teacher. However, this incident had an impact on Britney and made her reconsider her desire to work with those types of people and in this racially hostile environment in the future.

Bria, who attended the high school in her district with the largest Black population, shared her experience with institutional harm. She explained,

> They're taking away our sports. They are restricting what we can do. When we go back to school, we'll have the Yondr Pouches from TikTok to lock our phones away. We had a trial run with metal detectors. [Students] knocked the metal detectors over…

Bria explained her frustration that even though her school had their first Black (interim) principal, "they're not doing anything for the Black school, which is Obama High." Bria later went on to explain that the administration was too concerned with things that do not matter, like wearing hoodies. Bria connected her concerns about the daily administration of the school to the fact that her school is "the Black school" in her district. This speaks to her understanding of the ways Black people are both hyper-surveilled and under-resourced in their school system.

Both Ahlayah and Devin articulated how they witnessed white teachers exercising power and dominance over Black students. Ahlayah posited that this assertion of dominance stemmed from white teachers' lack of contact with and unwillingness to understand Black culture. He explained,

> I feel like with non-Black teachers, they feel like they have to try and assert dominance over us, because that's a whole new world that they know nothing about. And I feel like they're trying to assert themselves to you know [*Ahlayah imitates a teacher's voice*], 'Alright, I don't care where y'all came from, this my classroom', and it doesn't have to be like that at all.

Ahlayah asserted that non-Black teachers knew "nothing about" the world in which Black students lived, and unnecessarily tried to force Black students into submission harshly exerting their authority. His conclusion that "it doesn't have to be like that" speaks to teachers'

unwillingness or failure to understand and foster a positive relationship with Black students, and to Ahlayah's belief in Black students' willingness to be in good relationships with non-Black teachers. Devin, who has not had any Black teachers since elementary school, shared what has happened when a white teacher unkindly approached a Black student who was not where they were supposed to be in the school building, noting,

> *[Devin raises his voice and imitates a teacher]* 'Get to class! Get to class before I give you a referral!' or anything of that nature. It's just like the way a teacher comes off. I feel like sometimes, the power, I guess…will make a student like, 'Okay, that one time you unnecessarily did all that outburst on me. So now when I see you, it's just gonna be just all this mean negative mugging' and things like that. I witnessed that a lot in high school.

As Devin recounted this frequent response he witnessed from students, he drew attention to how teachers' assertion of power often manifested itself as unnecessary outbursts. Devin's example emphasized the impact of ineffective and unnecessarily hostile discipline strategies on Black students, often resulting in "mean mugging," a term used to describe a facial expression of anger or disdain upon encountering someone who has disrespected, demeaned, or violated you in some way.

Participants in this study also witnessed the harm experienced by their Black peers at the hands of white teachers who misjudged them or did not have the pedagogical and relational skills to maintain positive relationships with Black students. As participants described their experiences in classrooms, they acknowledged negative student behavior, but ultimately held the teachers responsible for not effectively addressing these behaviors. For example, although Tiffany believed, "there is a lot of behavioral problems within Black students," she continued by recognizing,

> The main people that I saw that were like intervention, that were there to help, were white. And frankly, I don't think that they have that connection to help them...it was always a pattern, they would come in and take the student out.

This circumstance illuminated her understanding that a positive connection is necessary to help Black students having behavioral problems instead of just removing them from the classroom. Further, she asserted that the white staff members responsible for these interventions did not practice the relational skills necessary to build those connections. Devin used the phrase "they take their job too seriously" to describe "teachers just picking at little things that aren't really that serious" and to explain the importance of relationships and understanding over aggressive punishment. He continued,

> Sometimes, it doesn't have to really be too serious. I know one thing that makes me want to listen to a teacher is engaging conversation. Like, maybe a person is not where they're supposed to be in the school building, if a teacher approaches them more like, 'Oh, hey, how you doing? Are you okay? Why are you not where you supposed to be? Can you get there, please?' Like, that, over, 'Get to class! Get to class before I give you a referral!' or anything of that nature.

Ahlayah articulated the difference between teachers who show understanding versus enact punishment when he compared non-Black teachers who "try and assert dominance over [Black students]" with "the teacher that understands how we grow up." Ahlayah noted that teachers who understand how Black students grow up, "know that it ain't nothing to be worried about. We're cool. We're cool, man." His assertion speaks to his belief that teachers who understand how Black students grow up will understand that they are not a threat or in need of domination.

Participants at Obama High school, Joe, Bria, and Ahlayah, attributed some teachers' lack of preparation to create positive relationships with students to systemic failings. Bria noted, "now we have teachers that's mostly substitutes. The teachers are never here. There's no control at the moment." These three participants explained that when their school was unable to fill vacant positions, substitute teachers, who had received no pedagogical training, were expected to maintain order in classrooms. Joe expounded,

> I think three of the seven subs we hired this year are no longer regular substitute teachers. Some of them are now labeled as employee staff teachers…what happened this year is they were given emails two weeks before the school year started and offered the position, given the payment details and everything, like hey, do you want to come teach?

When discussing his teachers' lack of pedagogical knowledge about building positive relationships with students, Ahlayah stated, "none of them are qualified. None of them have the certifications or anything to teach. I feel like they don't take enough time to really consider what goes on in the school before they jump right in."

Participants in this study reported myriad experiences of harm to themselves and other Black students perpetrated by white teachers and other school personnel. These harms included microaggressions, hyper-surveillance, and unduly harsh discipline. They attributed such harms to both inadequacies among school personnel and institutional conditions. Most participants believed some non-Black teachers lacked the preparation or willingness to develop positive relationships with Black students, and several described how white teachers exercised power and control to the detriment of Black students' well-being. Participants at Obama High, in particular, discussed how the school's lack of resources, cuts to extracurricular activities, and reliance on substitute teachers also contributed to the harms experienced by Black students. As described

earlier, data suggest participants did not have safe spaces in school to discuss or register concerns about their racialized experiences or to have them affirmed. Therefore, although they understood and expressed concern about the ways racially biased practices in their schools harmed themselves and other Black students, they had little, if any, recourse to have these harms addressed in school.

On Black teachers experiencing harm from administrators and white parents

When participants were asked on the questionnaire to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement "Black and white teachers are treated the same" in their school, three students strongly disagreed, two students disagreed, and Tiffany was neutral, stating, "we have very little Black teachers. I only have one Black teacher my entire year as a senior, so I don't really know how they are treated." Although all of the participants had very little contact with Black teachers, some who disagreed to varying degrees with the statement told stories about witnessing how Black teachers experienced psychological harm from white parents and were disregarded by administrators.

As stated above, white parents in this region are often involved in the day-to-day operations of the schools their children attend. White parents' presence in the school buildings allowed participants to witness the ways Black teachers handled white parents, often with no support from the administration. For example, Ahlayah told a story about a recent experience involving a Black teacher and a white parent, stating,

> I know [a Black] teacher at our school just got laid out last week by a white woman… [the parent] came out to the school saying all sorts of words, basically saying, 'you're not worthy of teaching my son'.

Bria shared her knowledge of an incident in which a Black teacher faced accusations from a white parent regarding the teacher having inappropriate parties, noting,

> She [the Black teacher] basically ended up just not coming back and ended up working in a different school because of how they [administrators] treated her and the school didn't have her back…they basically treated her like she was a random teacher, threw her stuff out on the streets and just didn't have her back in the whole situation.

As stated above, administrators often allowed white parents to influence circumstances in the school. Although Bria was discouraged by the way this Black teacher was treated by the white parent, it is also important to note that, from Bria's perspective, the Black teacher ultimately left the school because she was disregarded by the school administration.

Britney recalled a situation in which her Black teacher was ignored by administrators. Britney explained,

> I have one Black teacher now, and she is piloting the AP African American class at our school, and she's tried to set up so many field trips for us and so many opportunities. And the school kind of puts her on the back burner and doesn't offer her the same funding and materials that they offer to other programs.

This quote highlights a Black teacher who was working to provide students with a positive educational experience, but was unable to accomplish her goals due to lack of support from the school administration. Britney's experience with her AP African American studies teacher, who was her only Black teacher during high school, emphasized the institutional disregard for both the Black teacher and the only Black focused subject taught in the school. It is important to note that from Britney's perspective, the school was not lacking funds, overall, and she made a clear

comparison between the funds allocated to the African American studies class and other programs.

Although these participants had very few Black teachers, they recalled incidents where Black teachers experienced psychological harm from white parents and disregard from white administrators. As they developed their perceptions of what being a teacher could mean for them, they acknowledged what Black teachers must endure separate from direct instruction with students. For example, they noted white parents' power to berate Black teachers at work, and their lack of support from administrators in those circumstances. As stated earlier, the amount of power given to white parents in their schools led some participants to believe these interactions were inevitable. One participant also illuminated administrators' lack of support for a Black teacher who was attempting to provide students with unique educational opportunities to supplement a Black-centered curriculum. This circumstance draws attention to the lack of autonomy this Black teacher was given over the way they could enact their curriculum. These data were particularly salient given participants' minimal exposure to Black teachers and sparse examples of Black teachers' positive experiences. Therefore, as participants observed Black teachers who experienced harm at the hands of white parents and administrators, they developed a negative view of the teaching profession for Black individuals.

Summary

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." -Maya Angelou

Participants in this study witnessed and experienced the effects of anti-Black racism on a systemic and interpersonal level. To begin, their sparse exposure to Black teachers was a result of historical and contemporary systemic barriers to teaching that negatively and disproportionately impact Black individuals (Fenwick, 2021; Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1997).

Furthermore, participants noted the few Black teachers in their buildings were being subjected to psychological harm from white parents and disregarded by administrators. Participants shared, from personal experience and as witnessed among their Black peers, incidents of racial microaggressions, hyper-surveillance, and white teachers' and administrators' unnecessary assertions of dominance over Black students. As stated earlier, these participants navigated their schools with little, if any, mentorship from Black teachers who could help them name or process the racist incidents they witnessed and experienced. Therefore, these circumstances contributed to participants' understanding of their possible future work conditions if they chose to pursue teaching. In addition, participants reported how they repeatedly witnessed non-Black teachers' failure to establish positive relationships with Black students in their classrooms, resulting in their inability to successfully manage adverse classroom behaviors. Notably, participants did not attribute this lack of connection to non-Black teachers' inability to establish positive relationships with Black students, rather they attributed these negative interpersonal experiences to non-Black teacher's lack of pedagogical training or unwillingness to develop positive connections with Black students. Black teachers' experiences and participants' interactions with non-Black teachers shaped their perceptions of teachers and what they might expect as a future teacher. Consequently, as participants drew conclusions about the viability of the teaching profession for Black individuals, they negotiated the possibility of teaching in an environment in which they witnessed and experienced racism.

On participants' perceptions of the teaching profession

So, they're the first people you see. You spend the most time with them out of all the people in the school. They watch you interact. They watch your relationships, your friendships. And it's just kind of interesting to see how they bridge the gap between school and the student. -Britney

Students who participate in the K-12 public school system are developing their perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession every school day. Since teaching is an apprenticeship of observation, students develop their perceptions of teachers and teaching as they experience and observe interactions between teachers and students (Lortie, 2020). Participants in this study developed their perceptions of teachers and teaching based on their experiences with (mostly white) teachers and those teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication about the teaching profession.

Participant's perceptions of a "good" teacher were central to their decision-making process as they were deciding whether or not to choose teaching as a profession (to be discussed in the next chapter). Since participants in this study had very little exposure to Black teachers, they formed their conceptualizations of a "good" teacher by internalizing both favorable and unfavorable experiences with mostly white teachers. Participants also mentioned how their perceptions of teacher pay impacted their views of the teaching profession. However, as participants discussed teachers' low pay compared to teachers' expected workload, it became clear that most participants did not have a clear understanding of a teacher's actual salary.

This next section contributes to our understanding of participants' perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession based on their experiences in school. Participants developed these perceptions based on their understandings of what makes a "good" teacher, their perceptions of a teacher's salary, and teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication about the profession.

On characteristics of a "good" teacher

No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. -Unknown

Participants in this study associated good teachers with being a parent and part of their support system. Joe told a story about a new teacher who was struggling to form positive

relationships with her Black students. Joe encouraged the teacher to play music in the classroom because, in his words, "guaranteed, I would say that half the Black kids in our school have had a mother who has blasted their speaker while they are cleaning up in the house." Joe, like other participants, understood that when a teacher has qualities similar to a parent, some students may feel comfortable and, therefore, be open to a positive relationship with that teacher.

Participants used different aspects of nurturing to describe what it means for a teacher to be parental. For example, when Bria discussed the role of a teacher she asserted, "some of my favorite teachers are white, and they are there to push me and motivate me and be a second mother." Bria associated the ability to motivate students toward their potential, an important aspect of nurturing young people, with being parental. Similarly, Ahlayah described one of his favorite teachers, stating, "she was a white lady actually, and really pushed my love for math …She was like a mother." Similar to Bria, Ahlayah associated his favorite teacher with being a mother-figure who "pushed" him. These participants favored teachers who guided them toward reaching their goals, an attribute they associated with being a mother. Tiffany also described her favorite teacher as a parental figure and highlighted a few different aspects of nurturing. Tiffany explained,

> It's not really to do with the coursework or the schoolwork, primarily it's like she did her job, and she did more. So not only did she teach me, but she was also like a second parent to me, so I can always confide in her, vent to her. Whenever I was struggling to realize what I want to do with education, she answered all my questions truthfully, honestly.

Tiffany recognized that being able to process her thoughts and feelings through "venting" and asking questions was an important aspect of her growth, especially as she made decisions about the career path she wanted to pursue. She characterized her favorite teacher as both a confidante

and a sounding board. Similarly, Britney and Devin identified the defining qualities of their favorite teachers as their ability and willingness to listen and be a support for students. Devin shared his experience, stating,

> Sometimes in life, you go through things and you just need someone to talk to. So, when it comes down to that, if it's school work or even just, like, personal reasons, I feel like, what really makes me really like a teacher and make them my favorite is me being able to talk to them. The comfort once again.

Devin experienced teachers who listened to and supported him in his academic and personal life. These teachers helped shape what he believed about teachers' potential to be a positive influence in students' lives. Britney believed some teachers do not enjoy their jobs because they are not able to express, "the compassionate and the comfort side of things…and kind of just had to be a teacher rather than be the support system that they feel like we need." Her comment shows she believed good teachers recognize the importance of compassion and making students feel comfortable; and that the ability to provide this type of support is vital to their job satisfaction. Britney used a very specific scenario to explain what it could mean to support a student,

> They are that pillar that's going to be there for you, that's going to write you the pass to the bathroom…if a student comes up to you and they're crying and they're like, 'Hey, can I go to the bathroom?' It is also your responsibility to not only write that pass as a teacher, but also as that guidance, you're supposed to be like, 'Hey, are you okay?'...Like, granted, you're not a therapist and you're not a social worker, but you are that first line of defense before they can even get there.

In Britney's scenario, a good teacher is the "first line of defense" as students cope with emotional or psychological stressors. She recognized that good teachers created connections between the

student and other school resources, such as a school counselor or social worker. In this way, teachers are not only a part of students' support systems; they also actively expand those systems. Similarly, Bria shared a story that spoke to her understanding of what it means for a teacher to support a student, stating,

> Being able to support someone is being able to handle their emotions. I give you an example, there's one boy. Some people just feel like he's a lot because he'll literally flip a switch in a matter of a second. And he'll go from calm to being on 10. But I just feel like he doesn't have anywhere to release his energy. So being able to support him and giving him a room where he can just be his self helps him to get through the day.

Bria and Britney both believed that offering compassion and emotional support are the most important things a teacher can do for students.

The male participants in this study all believed the best teachers have a connection with their students. They believed the best way for teachers to connect with students is by being genuine and authentic. When describing teachers who he believed were genuine and authentic, Ahlayah said, "they had their own personality…they weren't like trying to act a certain way." Ahlayah understood that teachers all have different styles and methods of teaching and interacting with students, but what he appreciated most was teachers who show students the truest version of themselves. For example, Ahlayah described the importance of Black teachers being authentic,

> Even if that's just in their demeanor, like what they wear, or how they're talking, or like the jokes they tell. You can kind of get a vibe of when someone's faking being Black. You see Black, but you don't feel Black, you know? And I feel like I just had a better

> connection with the teachers that, you know, like maybe they even cuss once in a while. They weren't afraid to be what other people may call, not perfect, you know?

Ahlayah, the participant who had the most Black teachers, was clear that his description of an authentic teacher applied to both Black and non-Black teachers. Ahlayah later asserted, "students don't want to be teachers because the teachers that they have aren't really authentic," re-emphasizing the importance of modeling authenticity for students. Similar to Ahlayah's emphasis on connection and authenticity, Devin said,

> Teachers should go deeper than just teaching, you know? Like, connecting with the students in class. I know they have a lot of students and a few classes, but I feel like just being pure, genuine. I feel like that can really help a student.

To be clear, when Devin described connection, he was not referring to instructional strategies like changing the names in a writing prompt to sound more multicultural. Devin was emphasizing his desire for personal connection with his teachers through authentic conversations separate from the curriculum. Devin later added his appreciation for Black staff members who are not teachers, stating, "I feel like they can connect more. Be more understanding on outside things. On just like, troubles and traumas and things like that." It was important for Devin, who had not had a Black teacher since elementary school, to have teachers who understood him as more than a student, but also as a human who has out-of-school challenges.

Devin also tied his academic success to teachers' ability to connect with and understand him, stating,

> Outside factors can really stay on your mind throughout the whole school day. And I know this because I'm a victim of it. So, I know, if they're just being understanding, I

know, teachers have their criteria and all that, but like, just bend it just a little bit, just to understand people so that they can be successful.

When Joe described his ideas regarding authenticity, he emphasized reciprocity. He described a hypothetical ideal scenario where a teacher is able to "negotiate with the students, or connect with them, or collaborate" and students felt comfortable enough to "tell the teacher, 'Hey, I just need a minute', you know, to go take a walk or something like that," when they were having a bad day. Joe's example illuminated his understanding of how genuine lines of communication are opened when students feel an authentic connection with their teacher. The connection he described is likely to give students the necessary confidence and psychological safety to advocate for their needs.

Participants' perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession were constructed based on their interactions with teachers throughout their entire K-12 education. As they expressed their perceptions of good teaching, these participants were more concerned with interpersonal relationships between teachers and students than teachers' content knowledge. Although participants previously described negative and racist encounters with white teachers, they developed their perceptions of what good teaching entails by observing and interacting with both Black and white teachers. Notably, they each gave examples of white teachers who displayed significant attributes of a "good" teacher; including their ability to act as a parent-figure, provide emotional and psychological support for students, and build connections with students through authenticity. Participants did not describe these attributes as teachers' passive or fixed personality traits, but as an intentional performance of good teaching that sometimes went beyond the curriculum. They asserted their belief that non-Black teachers were capable of forming these sought after and important positive relationships. Ultimately, their perceptions of the teaching

profession centered around the idea that good teaching primarily required positive student-teacher relationships.

On perceptions of low pay

A lot of my teachers say it's not worth the pay, it's not worth the stress. -Bria

Most participants referenced comments they heard from specific teachers about their salary without being directly asked. Five out of six participants speculated that pay could possibly deter Black students from pursuing a K-12 teaching career, broadly, because of the perception that teachers do not receive a good salary. However, only two students, Bria and Tiffany, actually mentioned salary as one of their most important considerations for a future career.

Participants' understanding of "good" pay varied depending on their experiences with employment and various financial responsibilities. I asked three questions to gain a better understanding of how participants were thinking about their college choices and the possibility of teaching relative to a teacher's salary:

A. Do you think you could live a (financially) comfortable life on a teacher's salary?
B. If you were offered a complete 4-year scholarship to go to college and become a teacher, would you decide to teach?
C. Estimate a first-year certified teacher's annual salary based on the annual salary of someone who gets paid minimum wage (i.e. $15 per hour) and works approximately the same amount of time a teacher gets paid to work (i.e. 40 hours per week, 40 weeks per year) (see Table 2)

When asked to estimate a first-year certified teacher's salary in their district, most participants underestimated their answer by between $9,000 and $27,000 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Name	Anticipated future job	Actual first-year teacher salary in Districts 1 and 2	Participants' estimates of first-year teacher salary in Districts 1 and 2	Difference between actual and estimated first-year teacher salary
Ahlayah	Teacher	$54,000	$34,000	-$20,000
Tiffany	Teacher	$54,000	$40,000	-$14,000
Joe	Teacher	$54,000	$54,000	-$0
Devin	Broadcast journalism	$54,000	$38,000	-$16,000
Britney	Special Agent	$54,000	$27,000	-$27,000
Bria	Pharmaceutical science	$54,000	$45,000	-$9,000

The only participant who correctly approximated a first-year teacher's salary was Joe, the only student who did not mention pay as a possible deterrent for Black students as they consider teaching. When asked how he arrived at his salary approximation, Joe stated,

> So, I was about to say 60 grand, just based off of [recent state policy]. But then I remember that with my district, we have under-qualified teachers, so they're not paid the normal salary for a teacher with a degree. So, I was thinking, go around what the base salary would be when that comes out, but try and dock it down a little bit…our [high school teacher preparation program] teacher talks about it a lot.

Joe, who was part of a high school teacher preparation program in his district, was confident in his knowledge on teacher salaries in District 1 and still interested in pursuing a teaching position. Table 2 shows that, although participants understood teachers do not receive the pay they

deserve for the amount of work they do, most were unaware of the actual starting salary for teachers in their district and most of their approximations were not even close.

Bria and Tiffany were the only students who mentioned pay as one of the most important factors when choosing their own future profession. Tiffany, who was planning to study education in college, had a positive view of teacher pay. In explaining her decision to major in education, she considered, "the time it takes for me to be able to reach that certification or get that degree in order to teach… and the pay, so how much I'm making a year." After three years of being in a teacher preparation program during high school, Tiffany participated in a field trip to a college that made her aware of scholarship opportunities for education majors. This field trip led Tiffany to conclude, "my experience already with children, and the fact that there will eventually be a pay rise and they might pay for my schooling, I just, you know, let's do it!" Thus, Tiffany had an awareness of K-12 teachers' salary increases and how potential scholarships and her prior experience with children might help with college tuition and work in favor of an acceptable salary as a teacher.

Bria, who was not planning to pursue teaching, stated that her most important considerations when deciding on a future career were, "tuition and how financially stable I will be for my future and the distance from my family." When asked whether she would, hypothetically, pursue teaching if she was given a 4-year full scholarship to pursue education, Bria stated, "maybe due to it being a scholarship, but most likely not due to me not wanting to teach." She previously stated that the primary reason she did not want to teach was because of how she saw Black teachers treated in her school, therefore it is not surprising that, although she was concerned about tuition, scholarship money would probably not be enough to convince her to teach. In addition, Bria did not believe she could live a financially comfortable life as a

teacher because, "teachers always complain that the money is not worth it. I like expensive things and I feel I would need a good paying job to support me." Bria concluded that teaching was not a "good" paying job and could not support her desired lifestyle.

Of the three participants who planned to become a teacher, Ahlayah and Joe believed they could live a financially comfortable life as a teacher, and Tiffany said maybe. All three affirmed they would definitely pursue teaching if they were offered a 4-year full scholarship to college to become a teacher. Tiffany stated that tuition was one of her greatest concerns, and she would be "ecstatic" if that burden was off her shoulders. Ahlayah believed he could live comfortably on a teacher's salary because his father was a teacher and provided a financially comfortable life for Ahlayah and his brother. This circumstance gave Ahlayah personal experience with teachers' pay, leading him to assert, "people say teachers don't get paid good. They actually get paid quite decent." This aligns with Ahlayah's conjecture that Black students may not want to teach because they have never had a role model show them that teaching is, "a good pathway to enjoying life or cool or making enough money."

Like Ahlayah, Joe also believed could live a financially comfortable life as a teacher, However, his belief was grounded in his more accurate knowledge of teacher’s salaries in his district, which he believed would support his desired lifestyle. Tiffany was unsure if she could live a financially comfortable life as a K-12 teacher, but was still committed to pursuing education as a major. Tiffany explained that the financial pressure she experienced in her family made her previously consider a different profession. She stated that she questioned her choice to teach, asking herself, "so what about being a doctor? Going into business? And they didn't suit me." She gave more details on why she questioned her choice, explaining the impact of a common message communicated within Black families,

> The reason why I was kind of hesitating was, I don't want to sound superficial, but it was the pay. And my family's always said, when I was a kid, you gotta be something. You gotta make money when you're older. And you gotta help out your mom. You gotta help out your dad. You gotta help out your family when you get older. Because they've been taking care of people the last 18 years.

Although Tiffany was not sure whether she could live a financially comfortable life as a teacher, she was committed to pursuing education in college and as a future career.

Of the three students who decided not to pursue teaching as a career, Britney and Bria did not believe they could live a financially comfortable life as a teacher, whereas Devin believed he could. Although Devin asserted, "I hear a lot of teachers complain like their salary isn't enough, or things like that," he later explained that money was not his most important concern when choosing a future career. He stated, "Obviously a lot of people think the most important thing is money, which, you know, that is an important aspect in life. But to me, the most important thing is something I enjoy and something I like." This was consistent with his response that he would not pursue an education major even if offered a full scholarship because, "college is something that needs full interest for you to be successful." Similarly, Bria and Britney each stated they might take a full scholarship for teaching, but it would be unlikely because of their disinterest in teaching. Britney stated it would be "hypocritical" for her to major in education because, "I can’t see myself being as passionate about it as I’d like for my teachers to be." Her response illuminated how her perceptions of a good teacher influenced her decision to not pursue teaching as a career, regardless of salary. Passion for teaching seems to be more of a concern for these participants than "good" pay.

Although they all heard teachers describe their pay as inadequate, these data revealed participants' mixed understandings of how much first-year teachers receive as a salary. Five participants' estimations for a first-year teachers' salary were well below the actual salaries for their districts, revealing that participants determined their perception of an adequate wage based on what they had seen and heard from trusted adults rather than their personal experiences regarding what is required to live a financially comfortable lifestyle. Attention to Black high school students' perspectives about teacher salary may provide different insight as compared to Black college students and adults who may think about the financial risks and benefits of teaching based on their personal lived experiences. Despite their estimations of low teacher salaries, three students decided to pursue teaching as a career because they believed teaching could provide enough money to support their desired lifestyles. They attributed their knowledge and belief that a teaching salary would be sufficient to their TPPs and family members who provided them with information regarding the financial benefits of teaching. This points to the impact when Black high school students were provided with accurate and relatable financial information regarding teaching as a career. Finally, salary was a deterrent for only one of the three students who decided to pursue something other than teaching. Instead, all three of those participants were primarily pushed away from teaching as they observed how Black teachers were treated in schools or pushed toward a career for which they were more passionate than teaching. These participants' perceptions of teaching as a viable career choice was not primarily based on money.

On teachers' perceived job satisfaction

Again, because teaching is an apprenticeship of observation, students have the unique opportunity to ask teachers about their job satisfaction every day, in real-time. Teachers are

always communicating whether or not teaching is a good career choice through their words and actions. Participants' considerations of whether or not the teaching profession was a viable option were influenced by their current and previous teachers' perceived job satisfaction.

Participants perceived their teachers' job satisfaction through the teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, Ahlayah determined that Black students may not want to teach because they have observed teachers who non-verbally communicate dissatisfaction with their profession. He explained, "they don't look happy doing their job, and no little kid is going to want to say, oh, I want to spend the rest of my life being miserable." Participants also gave attention to the things they heard teachers say about teaching during the school day. Devin, who made a decision to pursue something other than teaching, described the impact of hearing teachers complain about their job, stating,

> What teachers say and when they complain, that makes me look at their job, like, I know for myself, I wouldn't want that. If that's gonna be my career, I wouldn't want to be a teacher and I'm just miserable and complaining about it every day.

Similarly, Britney, who also decided to pursue a career other than teaching explained,

> Teachers that I've been closest to, for example, Miss P…she'll be like, 'Today was really hard'…some days it's just really rough, and she's really the only teacher that'll say anything. And that did kind of impact me a little bit…I have had a couple other teachers, mostly my younger teachers, that are just more relatable to us, they'd be like, 'I just hate my job'. And I'm like, 'You know what? Understandable.'"

Britney's experience illuminated how teachers' words potentially impact Black students' perceptions of the teaching profession. She also pointed out that when young teachers said they hated their job, she felt it was justified and confirmed what she already believed about teaching.

Tiffany shed light on what she believed was teachers' misconception that their words do not impact students. She explained that students respond to negative things teachers say about teaching, stating,

> Even though they don't think students are like responding to that, they are. Like in the back of their mind. I feel like in my experience, y'all job kind of sucks, you know? So, even though they're not thinking what it could be doing to students who want to go into that profession, and they're just saying it out loud, it is very negative, and it does add on to what you think of the job.

Finally, Joe shared that there were some teachers who spoke positively about the teaching profession with students. Joe determined, however, that students heard more negative than positive assessments of job satisfaction among teachers. Joe explained,

> At least at our school, they're going to be talking about the negative things like, 'Oh, my God, I can't get this student to do this'. 'I'm not paid enough for this.' That line specifically said a lot of times by a lot of different people, and a lot more people hear those kinds of conversations instead of the few teachers at my school that'll talk about, because they told me themselves, teaching is a good career.

Most participants determined some teachers are not satisfied with their jobs because they heard those teachers communicate their dissatisfaction verbally. They believed that teachers', especially Black teachers', perceived dissatisfaction with teaching contributed to Black students' perceptions of the teaching profession. Some participants expressed that the negative comments they heard from teachers about teaching aligned with the things they witnessed during school, such as poor student teacher relationships and lack of support from administrators. Therefore,

unlike most other professions, participants gained knowledge about the costs and benefits of teaching through on-the-job interactions and conversations with teachers.

Summary

Participants developed their perceptions about teachers and teaching through their relationships and conversations with their teachers for the past 12 years. They developed their perceptions of what it meant to be a good teacher through their personal experiences and by witnessing the experiences of their peers. These students all described positive experiences with teachers who showed them and their peers non-academic support and acted as a parent-figure in their lives. As participants were grappling with their decisions to become or not become a teacher, they were also taking into consideration teachers' verbal and nonverbal communication regarding their own job satisfaction. For most participants, the desire to be a good teacher and their desire to enjoy teaching affected the viability of a career in teaching more than any financial concerns.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on bringing to light participants' schooling experiences, in their own words. Specifically, I explored participants' experiences with (mostly) white teachers and how those experiences impacted their perceptions of teachers and teaching. As Black, rural students in schools with large white student populations, participants were able to directly compare their schooling experiences with those of their white peers. They communicated the ways white students were perceived and treated more favorably by teachers and administrators than Black students. Participants also brought to light how white students sometimes benefited from their parents' out-of-school relationships with white teachers and their parents' successful

interventions when the students were disciplined in school. Furthermore, participants did not have many spaces or the safety to verbalize and make sense of the anti-Blackness and systemic racism they experienced and observed in the school.

As participants described their experiences in schools and with white teachers, they often drew attention to the ways they witnessed and experienced psychological harm. They shared incidents of microaggressions, hyper-surveillance, and unnecessary assertions of dominance over Black students by white teachers and administrators. They witnessed non-Black teachers who failed to establish positive relationships with Black students in their classrooms. They also described incidents where Black teachers in the building were subject to psychological harm from white parents and disregard from administration.

As participants further developed their perceptions of teaching and teachers, they considered what it meant to be a "good" teacher based on their lived and witnessed experiences in schools. Participants believed good teachers provide students with non-academic support and act as parental figures in students' lives. Furthermore, when evaluating the teaching profession, they took into consideration teachers' verbal and nonverbal communication regarding their job satisfaction and material reward.

The next chapter will explore how experiences in schools and with teachers directly impacted participants' decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching. Participants also gave recommendations, based on their experiences and what they have witnessed, regarding strategies to increase interest in teaching among Black students.

Chapter 6: Findings (2)

The findings in this chapter focus on what attracted participants to and deterred them from teaching as well as their proposed strategies for recruiting Black students into the teaching profession. These findings are separated into two parts. The first part explores the attractors and deterrents participants identified, along with their observations and speculations about why their Black peers may be attracted to and deterred from teaching. The second part summarizes participants' suggested strategies for increasing the number of Black K-12 students who want to pursue teaching.

Attractors and Deterrents

This section explores participants' attractors to and deterrents from the teaching profession based on their experiences in school and their career ambitions. Three participants, Ahlayah, Joe, and Tiffany, had decided to pursue teaching as a career. All three were enrolled in teacher preparation programs in their district high schools. At the time of this study, Ahlayah and Joe were both in their final course of a four-course teacher preparation program, and Tiffany had completed all four courses for the program in her district. Devin, Bria, and Britney previously considered being an educator but had changed their minds and decided to pursue other careers. None of the participants who decided to pursue other careers participated in a teacher education program, however, they all had close family members who were educators. All participants provided insights regarding factors that influenced them and their peers to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career.

Participants explained how their experiences in schools and with teachers influenced their decisions to pursue teaching as a career. Importantly, most participants bore witness to teachers' inability to create positive learning environments for Black students, and some expressed Black

students' unwillingness to work in an environment that proved harmful for them. Finally, participants explained that both passion and altruism drew them to teaching and to alternative careers.

On Black students' third person observations of negative classroom environments

They'll [Black students] say certain thoughts, like, 'I don't think I would ever want to deal with these kids' based off of how they see a teacher working, -Joe

As previously discussed, participants believed the most important role of a teacher was to support and encourage their students, especially as it pertained to helping them navigate non-academic and out of school experiences. Although participants could recall experiences with whom they considered good teachers, when considering whether or not teaching was a viable option for them, most of their decisions were guided by their most common experiences with teachers. More often, these experiences were negative; participants witnessed teachers who did not create supportive or encouraging relationships with students, which diminished some participants' desire to become a teacher. Five participants suggested Black students are deterred from the teaching profession because they frequently witnessed teachers' inability to create positive relationships and manage disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Joe aptly named this phenomenon "third person observation." He stated,

> You know how there's certain students that cut up?…I would say that they [Black students] do third person observations. They'll be in a classroom, but then they'll really think about the classroom, and they'll say certain thoughts, like, 'I don't think I would ever want to deal with these kids' *based off of how they see a teacher working*. I think that's what could set them back from wanting to pursue that career. (italics added)

As explained earlier, due to the shortage of teachers in his district, Joe observed underprepared teachers attempting to lead classrooms. Joe's reflection brings attention to the way

teachers without the pedagogical skills necessary to create positive relationships with students can negatively impact Black students' decisions to eventually teach. Joe suggested that Black students' unwillingness to pursue teaching may be based on "how they see a teacher working," with students who display adverse behaviors ("cut up"). Additionally, study data suggest if students consistently witness teachers who are unable to effectively manage adverse classroom behaviors, it may diminish their ability to imagine themselves as a teacher. For example, although Tiffany was planning to become a teacher, she shared a story about a teacher who had a moment of distress during class to illuminate what she believed deterred her peers from teaching,

> I've seen a teacher literally have a panic attack. She threw her papers up in the air and screamed at us to 'just shut the hell up', literally. And so you see all these experiences through the years of school, and you're like, 'I'm not becoming a teacher. This is too much. I can't do this.'

Tiffany recounted this experience to explain how Black students may be discouraged from teaching due to repeated encounters with teachers who manage their classrooms in ways that are demeaning or abusive to students. Tiffany noted that students chose to reject teaching after facing such experiences over many years of school.

Devin, who had not had a Black teacher since elementary school, described how students' behaviors can deter Black students from becoming teachers. Devin noted, "students do give teachers a hard time, even when they ask for little. So, yeah, that indeed would stop me from wanting to become a teacher, because it can be hard." Devin later added,

> Especially at the high school level, you got to deal with a lot of disrespectful kids that don't really want to do what they're supposed to do. So, it's like, do I want to make that my job and put that on myself?

Devin described students giving their teachers, "a hard time," and being, "disrespectful," and decided he did not want that for his future. Importantly, Devin drew his conclusions about the behaviors and attitudes of students based, primarily, on observing how his white teachers attempted to manage their classrooms, without any recent examples of Black teachers interacting with students. That is to say, most of Devin's examples of pedagogical practices came from teachers who did not share his racial background.

Likewise, Britney did not want to be a teacher and suggested, for Black students, there is a correlation between the viability of teaching and white teachers' inability to create bonds with Black students. Britney, who had one Black teacher during high school, observed,

> There's not many examples [of Black teachers]…If there were more, then maybe it would be something that seemed more attainable for people. But because we have so many instructional assistants and like hallway patrol that are Black, and they have better bonds with students than most of our teachers do. So, it's just kind of like teaching has never been advertised to Black students as much as it has been to other races.

Britney used the words "advertised" and "attainable" to address the appeal of teaching to Black students. She suggested that teaching was not appealing to Black students because they repeatedly witnessed their white teachers' inability to create good bonds with students. She pointed out that Black school staff members who were not teachers had better relationships with Black students than white teachers and posited that without examples of Black teachers, Black students are not drawn toward the teaching profession.

As different from Devin, Ahlayah, who had three Black teachers during high school, was not deterred from becoming a teacher by the student behavior he witnessed in classrooms. He explained,

> [Teachers] don't like how the kids act in the school, but they don't really take it out on the kids. They're really mad at the administration for not being able to handle it right…It hasn't really impacted me, though, and wanting to be a teacher, because, again, those two [Black] teachers I mentioned earlier. They keep it pushing. They don't really get bothered by it. And I feel like at the end of the day, if you really want to do your job, you'll put up with whatever you're given.

Ahlayah's recent experiences provided him with examples of Black teachers who were not distressed by students' misbehaviors. As Ahlayah witnessed such behaviors, he began to problem solve and imagined himself in the role of a teacher. For example, he suggested, in managing difficult students,

> You still gotta find a way to connect with them, to make them want to be there, because ain't no student going to pass your class if they don't want to be there. They're just going to ignore you or smart mouth you and do a whole bunch of other stuff.

Ahlayah's comment revealed his understanding that adverse student behavior in the classroom can be mitigated or avoided if teachers foster meaningful connections with students. His quote also revealed his ability to imagine strategies for creating positive relationships with students.

Joe also experienced classrooms with student misbehavior, and as with Ahlayah, those experiences did not deter him from pursuing teaching as a career. Joe explained, "I'm prepared to put up with disrespect or intolerable behavior, but I know maybe within the first few weeks, I'll finally have some kind of control over students." When I asked Joe about his plan for gaining cooperation from his students, he said he would utilize a strategy he called "opportunity cost." Imagining himself in the role of a teacher, he explained,

> In the sense of discipline, I would say that teachers have to undergo in a way, I know it's not the real definition, but something called opportunity cost. So, let's say you got a student that constantly lashes out, like out of nowhere, at the teacher or at students for their own personal reasons. So in a way, even though you don't want them to cuss and you don't want them to go off on other students, you could try to work in a somewhat tolerable disciplinary solution and say, 'Okay, you can't go off on students, but I will allow you the privilege to still use profanity to express your emotions.'

Although Joe only had one Black teacher during high school, his participation in the teacher preparation program gave him tools to imagine himself effectively managing his classroom despite the possibility of disrespectful student behavior. He recognized students' need to express their emotions and described a compromise in which they could do so, within boundaries he created.

Although Tiffany planned to pursue teaching, she determined that some Black students believed the work it takes to manage difficult student behaviors was not worth the reward. She compared teachers' relationships with students to limited rewards they received for their efforts, stating,

> One thing that I've heard is that they [Black students] don't want to deal with disrespectful children. It's just too much work, and for a little gratitude and for a little pay. It's a lot of work, and they're not really getting a lot out of it.

Tiffany's insight revealed that some Black students assumed, as teachers, they would be disrespected by students, and concluded that the effort it would take to create positive relationships with students was not worth the material reward. Her assumption about student

disrespect and how it is perceived by teachers was likely due to her own observations in school, including witnessing teachers' inability to create a positive classroom environment.

Participants' experiences and observations suggest that some Black students are deterred from teaching because they repeatedly observe teachers who are unable or unwilling to create positive relationships with students. Participants' observations largely took place in the classrooms with white and underprepared teachers. Participants suggested that, based on such experiences over many years in schools, some Black students assumed that teachers must contend with disrespectful and misbehaving students, which made it difficult for them to imagine themselves in that role. However, the study participants who participated in a teacher preparation program or observed Black teachers who had positive interactions with students, were not deterred by student misbehavior and imagined creative and effective ways to build relationships with (future) students.

On the impact of systemic racism and anti-Blackness

Participants' experiences and observations suggest that the effects of systemic racism and anti-Blackness can deter Black students from the teaching profession. For example, they reported on how the out-of-school effects of systemic racism, such as Black youth being more likely to live in poverty than white youth, impacted Black students' experiences in school and their orientations toward teaching. Furthermore, participants suggested some Black students did not want to participate in a profession that caused Black students and Black teachers psychological harm rooted in anti-Blackness.

Devin shared his personal struggle with difficult circumstances outside of school and recognized that his situation was not unique, stating, "I feel like there's like a harder life and

harder times for the Black students." Devin recognized the impact of out-of-school factors on Black students' in-school experiences and, ultimately, their decisions to reject teaching as a potential career. For example, Devin shared what he believed to be a common scenario based on his understanding of racial disparities,

> Not knocking any white students like saying they don't got problems or whatever, but I just feel like black students encounter more early life problems… which affects them going into school…Just like a domino effect; the early life problems they encounter makes them not care for school as much or influence how well they do in school, then that influences why they wouldn't want to become a teacher, because throughout school, they didn't even like it, or they didn't have good times.

He used the term "domino effect" to describe a causal sequence that begins with Black students having difficulties outside of school, leading to poor academic performance or disinterest in school. He believed this chain of events caused some Black students to develop a general dislike for school, and therefore they did not choose teaching as a career. This domino effect implies Black students' disinterest in teaching, as connected with their dislike of school, more generally, may begin while they are young and persist throughout their K-12 education.

On the other hand, Britney pointed to a systemic, economic reason Black students may not want to pursue teaching as a career. Britney explained,

> I have always felt like certain careers were catered to Black people, and teaching is not one of them. I literally know, like three or four white girls that are so excited to go and get their degree in education so that they can go be a teacher…With all the controversy going on around how teachers are paid, that kind of plays into it. Because most of the people that can live off of that wage are already living comfortably because of the way

> the system is set up for them to succeed. But if you look at a Black kid that grew up in Section Eight housing and then is living off food stamps, they're not going to go for a job that pays that much money. So, I just feel like everything is kind of connected in its own way.

Britney drew a direct contrast between "white girls" who were excited to teach and a hypothetical "Black kid" whose family received government assistance. Britney understood this contrast as a result of a system in which whites were "set up" for success (and Blacks were not), and she connected some Black students' disinterest in teaching to their family's financial situation. Her statement assumed Black students in financially difficult situations might conclude a teacher's salary is insufficient to meet their needs.

In addition to the effects of systemic racism, participants brought attention to the psychological harm, rooted in anti-Blackness, that Black students and teachers endure during the school day. One way this psychological harm showed up in participants' data was in the physical environments of schools. For example, Britney commented on the general aesthetic of classrooms, stating,

> You walk into those classrooms nowadays and it's just desks and harsh lights, and it just doesn't feel like somewhere you want to be, often it feels like a jail… People learn better when they're comfortable. So, I just feel like you shouldn't place them in a position where they feel like a target or a prisoner.

Black students who endure anti-Blackness in schools that feel like jails (Jenkins & Warren, 2024) may not want to return to an environment in which they "feel like a target or a prisoner." In addition, after describing a personal experience with anti-Black mistreatment from a white

administrator who ordered her to be searched for drugs, Britney expounded on how being hyper surveilled impacted Black students' desire to become a teacher. She noted,

> It's really a turn off for a lot of Black students. Why would I want to be a teacher and work in the environment that I'm being shown? Even if I had all these positive experiences with this teacher, this one admin[istrator] that I got into an encounter with in eighth grade is going to stick out like a sore thumb because those are people talking to you now, but those are the people that can be your co-workers in the future.

Britney drew on her personal experience to explain her belief that Black students do not want to become co-workers with white staff members who previously mistreated them as students. She further pointed out that her positive experiences with white teachers did not offset the impact of those who caused her psychological harm.

Finally, Bria and Ahlayah explained that some Black students did not want to teach because they observed how Black teachers are treated in schools by non-Black administrators and white parents. For example, Bria considered becoming a teacher, and explained her change of heart, stating,

> My ninth-grade year, I had a lot of, like, diversity, I guess within my teachers. I've had Black ones, male ones, female ones, white ones. I was able to experience different people around me… as of my ninth-grade year, I started seeing how they [administrators] did the Black teachers, and it was just like, I don't want, I don't like this type of environment.

Bria pointed out how she had witnessed Black teachers receiving poor treatment from administrators who treated white teachers more favorably. This poor treatment of Black teachers contributed to her decision to reject teaching as a possible career. Ahlayah also talked about how

Black teachers were mistreated, describing an incident he witnessed in which a white parent berated a Black teacher. He concluded,

> Not many people got the patience for that… don't think [the Black teacher] just let it slide, but, just stuff like that. It would make someone question whether or not they want to do that the rest of their lives.

Both Ahlayah's and Bria's examples point to how Black students may be deterred from the teaching profession because they witnessed Black teachers experiencing anti-Black harm from white parents and administrators, particularly in contrast to the more favorable ways they saw white teachers being treated.

Participants believed that Black students may not want to teach in the future, due to negative experiences they had in schools. In giving the reasons for this belief, participants drew attention to the role of systemic racism and anti-Blackness in Black students' decisions to reject teaching as a possible career. As stated in this and the previous chapter, participants witnessed and experienced psychological harm to Black students and teachers in school. They speculated that Black students may not want to return to an environment in which they were hyper-surveilled and mistreated. They saw Black teachers being disrespected and disregarded and did not want to imagine themselves in that position in the future. Also, and importantly, participants believed that teachers' salaries are not commensurate with the amount of work Black teachers must do: managing students' difficult behaviors and contending with anti-Black discrimination from white teachers, administrators, and parents. They concluded that many Black students are not willing to endure such forms of mistreatment, as teachers, for what they assumed was low pay. Ultimately, these findings suggest, the conditions under which Black students are educated

in K-12 public schools and ways Black teachers are treated, can negatively impact Black students' desire to return to that environment, as teachers, in the future.

On the desire to pursue passion and positive impact

All study participants had considered teaching at some point, and although some changed their minds, they had very similar considerations when deciding on their potential, future careers. That is, they expressed passion for their chosen careers, and most participants described altruistic reasons for their career choices, centered on social and racial justice and the impact they wanted to have on the marginalized groups to which they belong.

Participants who did not think they could be passionate about teaching moved toward different career goals. For example, Britney explained, "I can't see myself being as passionate about it as I'd like for my teachers to be." She believed the best teachers were passionate about teaching, so she decided teaching was not her best career choice. Devin also concluded teaching was not the best job for him for similar reasons. Devin explained,

> I wouldn't want to be a teacher and I'm just miserable and complaining about it every day…I feel like you have to be interested into it, because if not, then it's going to be hard and miserable… But if you're interested, that's going to make you want to go in. Go hard. You know, keep pushing, keep going.

Devin's insight showed his understanding of teaching as a challenging career, but he asserted that people who are "interested" can "keep pushing" and continue to teach despite difficulties. In addition to their desire for a career they were passionate about, five participants also had altruistic ambitions for their future careers.

Each of the three students who desired to be a teacher stated some sort of benevolent goal regarding their future career. For example, they said things like, "I like being able to help

people," (Ahlayah), "the impact that I would have is the most important right now," (Joe), and "if I'm helping those students who don't speak the same language as us move forward in their education, I'd feel so amazing" (Tiffany). Joe and Ahlayah expressed a specific desire to make an impact on the people in District 1. For example, Joe stated, "I think if I actually stayed local, then I could maybe encourage more people to go pursue their careers, and they could actually believe me, since I came from the same exact place that they did." Joe's reasoning revealed his understanding of the unique, positive impact he could have as a teacher in his local community. More specifically, Joe shared, "I know I definitely want to make an impact as a teacher to all of my students, but definitely to the students of color that are going to be in classrooms." Joe, like many Black teachers (Brown, 2011), had a particular interest in uplifting his Black community through teaching. Similarly, Ahlayah explained, "I want to teach at Obama High School, because I feel like that's an area that needs a lot of help." Ahlayah's desire to remain in his community to teach was rooted in his attention to the needs of and his desire to make a positive impact in his community. Ahlayah further explained,

> I just want to change lives. I'm not going to be the president or anything like that. That's stressful. But I feel like in my community, I feel like the best way to change lives is by giving them an impact while they're young, so it can stay with them as they grow older.

Although Tiffany did not necessarily desire to remain in her local community, as a multilingual student, she wanted to make a difference in the lives of future multilingual students. Tiffany described her ideal classroom, stating, "I want all types of students, no matter where they come from, what language they speak, to feel comfortable in my classroom." It was important for Tiffany to provide her future students with an environment conducive to learning and attentive to all students' unique needs.

Both Joe and Tiffany had altruistic ambitions specifically centered on justice for the marginalized groups to which they belonged. For example, when Tiffany explained the importance of multilingual students feeling comfortable in her future classroom, she drew attention to her observation that, in District 2, multilingual students did not receive as much help as they needed. She said,

> They have a lot of things translated, so [District 2 is] accommodating, but [multilingual students are] still falling behind. And so that's another thing that I wanted to do as a teacher, when I get there, hopefully I'm able to stop those kids from falling behind.

Joe had a specific interest in helping Black students in his community thrive in the midst of systemic racism. In talking about his future students, explained,

> I think I would try to encourage certain careers for them. I'd let them know, 'Hey, you might hear things about police brutality or Black people being put down every day in this society. But that isn't supposed to really stop you. It might be an obstacle, but you can still make it through the thick and thin, as long as you keep pushing'.

As they reflected on their experiences in schools, Joe, Ahlayah, and Tiffany reasoned that they were drawn to teaching because of their altruistic ambitions. Specifically, they prioritized helping the marginalized groups and communities to which they belonged, through teaching.

Britney and Devin had similar altruistic ambitions to help the marginalized group or community to which they belonged, but chose to pursue careers other than teaching. Britney explained some of her most important considerations when deciding her future career, stating,

> My first would be my work life balance. I need my downtime, my self-care days…but besides that, I think probably my biggest thing is the impact that I leave, because you're only on this earth for so long. So, I do want to be the difference in somebody's life, even

> if it's just one or two people. But my goal is to make my outreach as far as I possibly can and help anybody in any way that I can.

Although Britney wanted to make a difference in other people's lives, she reasoned that teaching was not the best way for her to do so. When asked why she did not choose teaching, Britney explained her desire to pursue a career she viewed as more interesting and more impactful, stating,

> My biggest thing was that I wanted to do more. Like, I wanted to have a bigger outreach. And even though I feel like teaching is one of the ways to do that, I think there's so many other ways that interest me more.

She recognized that teaching has a great social impact, but reasoned that, "even if I was shown more Black individuals teaching, my heart will always be drawn in other directions where I feel I can make the most impact." Britney discussed how other careers have a greater impact on other people than teaching because teachers were restricted by state curricula. Therefore, she did not have an interest in teaching. More specifically, Britney stated,

> I think majority of the reason why I didn't want to become a teacher, like I said, was that I couldn't teach what I wanted. But I also feel like now they're getting more and more strict with what you can and cannot teach. Like, I know they're banning so many books that were so monumental to me growing up… that just kind of makes the job seem so much more unappealing to me.

Instead of teaching, Britney decided to pursue a criminal justice major in college. Similar to other participants whose altruistic ambitions centered on justice for marginalized groups, Britney explained that her, "interest in criminal justice and law enforcement really peaked during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020." Although she was only a middle school student at the time,

she explained, "that was when I was kind of secure and stable in what I wanted to do." Since Britney ultimately planned to pursue her passion for criminal justice, it is important to understand what drew her to her preferred career choice, namely her desire "to just make sure that everybody has the safe places they need, that they feel secure and they don't fear going to school or going to work because they're not supposed to."

Devin previously viewed working in the school system as a viable way to make an impact on the world. In describing the catalyst for his interest in working in K-12 education system, he recounted the story of someone thanking him for help, stating, "he was like, 'Oh my gosh, thank you so much, you're such a genius, like you're gonna really impact and change the world.'" He explained,

> It seemed small at the time, but when I really thought about it, I want to work in the school system because that's where kids and teenagers spend a lot of their time. So, if they're spending most of their time there, and someone can lead them in the right direction outside of school… you know, the real world and things like that, instead of always just, 'Oh, you gotta do this essay and this math problem.' Things that actually are going to be stuck with you for life…that's something I really want to do.

However, similar to Britney, Devin did not think he would be satisfied teaching a state mandated curriculum, and would rather teach "real world" lessons that lead students "in the right direction outside of school." As an example of a real-world lesson, he talked about one of his current teachers who was helping him understand the college application process.

Devin, who planned to pursue a career in broadcast journalism instead of working in the school system, believed he could make a difference in his community by being successful in

whatever career he was passionate about. Devin thought about his impact in terms of being a role model for people in his community. In his own words:

> I feel like Black students often live in communities that struggle as well, so that can also affect them. Just adapting to actions and habits that they see in the community that are negative. And just knowing, I don't live in the best community, but just seeing I can make a change for myself, that will be a big accomplishment itself for me. So that's another reason why, I just try to do better in school and try to stay doing great things in school, because if someone sees…this person did this and they was in the same situation as you, they'll see it like, oh, that's possible. Then they'll want to push themselves to do that. Like, if he can do it, then I know I can do it, you know? So that motivates me.

Devin also reflected on how seeing the success stories of famous people inspired him, and he resolved to become a model of success for the Black people in his community.

Some participants were not only drawn away from teaching; they were also drawn toward other passions and desires. Most participants in this study wanted a future career that would allow them to make a difference in the world. Specifically, they desired to have an impact on their immediate communities and others in the racial or linguistic groups to which they belong. Although some participants did not desire to pursue teaching, their observations and experiences of injustice in the world fueled their enthusiasm to make positive social change through their various career aspirations.

Summary

Participants shared their stories, observations, and desires leading to their decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a career. These participants had very few Black teachers, and their stories illuminated that "third person observations" of (mostly white) teachers who are

unable to create positive relationships with students are a deterrent from teaching for some Black students. As explained in previous findings, participants experienced psychological harm in school through hyper surveillance and mistreatment from white teachers, and they witnessed Black teachers being mistreated by white parents and disregarded by white administrators. As participants shared their experiences and observations, it became clear that they believed the compounding effects of systemic racism and anti-Blackness created a "domino effect," that can lead Black students to decide they do not want to teach in the same environment that has caused Black people harm. Finally, all three participants who were planning to pursue teaching were drawn to the career because of altruism and the desire to help their own and other marginalized communities. Two participants who changed their mind about teaching were originally drawn to teaching for altruistic reasons but ultimately decided to make an impact through a different career in which they felt a deeper interest. As participants made sense of their attractors to and deterrents from teaching, they provided insight on how to attract more Black students to the teaching profession.

Solutions: Early and direct exposure to the positive aspects of teaching

Participants were each attracted to teaching at some point in their lives and, at the time of the study, three still planned to pursue teaching in college. As they reflected on their experiences with mostly white teachers and what they witnessed among Black teachers and Black students, participants identified factors that were important when they decided whether or not to pursue teaching as a profession. When they described their experiences in schools, they told stories about racism and anti-Black harm perpetrated by white teachers, underprepared teachers, and problematic administrators. They shared what they loved about their favorite teachers and what they learned from their few Black teachers. Participants also reflected on what they heard and

experienced from teachers regarding their job satisfaction. They considered the ways their teachers managed difficult student behaviors and then imagined their future possibilities as teachers. As participants contemplated their desired impact on the world and goals for the future, their observations and conclusions provided insights into strategies for encouraging Black high school students to consider teaching as a viable career.

After considering participants' reasons for choosing their future careers and asking what their school system could do to recruit more of their Black peers into teaching, their responses indicated that participants believed Black high school students would be drawn to the teaching profession through early and direct exposure to the positive aspects of teaching. Participants suggested positive interpersonal relationships with school staff, beginning in the early years of schooling, as an effective way to provide direct exposure to potential attractors to teaching. Furthermore, responses indicated that they believed Black students may be attracted to the teaching profession through honest conversations with teachers about their job satisfaction. Participants' feedback illuminated the necessity for direct exposure to teaching through opportunities for Black high school students to practice and formally learn about the teaching profession. Finally, some participants suggested it was important to evoke Black students' desire to make an impact on Black children as a future teacher.

Through how students are treated by teachers and other school personnel

> *…likely because of the way that Black students are treated. I think everything kind of starts at base one. -Britney*

As stated in previous findings, participants suggested Black students' perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession were informed by their own schooling experiences. When asked why there was a shortage of Black teachers in her district, Britney made the statement

above. For her, base one denotes Black students' experiences in the classroom and interactions with teachers and other school staff. Britney understood that poor interpersonal relationships and harmful experiences with teachers and administrators, may diminish Black students' desire to pursue teaching as a profession. Referring to Black students' potential interest in teaching, Britney added to this idea, stating, "I think it starts in school, like that interest doesn't just come out of nowhere. And I think it starts young honestly." Britney asserted that, unlike most other professions, students become interested in teaching during and after actively witnessing teachers at work. She recognized that, from a young age, the way Black students are treated in school has an impact on their decisions to teach.

Bria believed that more Black students may want to teach if they are encouraged by teachers and staff members to pursue teaching. Similar to the experience Devin recounted in a previous chapter, Bria explained that Black boys in her school were negatively stereotyped and assumed to have poor grades. She noted a racial disparity in how students were discouraged from their pursuit of teaching as a career based on these stereotypes, stating,

> Instead of only focusing on like white kids to become the teachers, I feel like everybody should just focus on students as individuals, no matter what their race is. I know several Black kids, male, who wanted to become teachers, but because they were stereotyped, they're now changing their ideas and going for like trade schools or stuff that's no longer to do with teaching, because they were told [by teachers and staff] they're not good enough to be a teacher and they would never make it.

Bria's observation draws attention to how teachers and other school staff members may squelch Black male students' interest in the teaching profession and discourage them from that goal. She also highlighted teachers' beliefs about who was "good enough" to become a teacher, namely

their ideas about what qualified a person to teach. Bria suggested her Black male peers may have continued in their pursuit of teaching if teachers' negative stereotypes did not hinder their confidence in their ability to teach. She continued by saying Black students may be encouraged to pursue teaching if they are surrounded by individuals who affirmed and supported their strengths. Bria believed, to pursue teaching, Black students need,

> Just a support system. Provide them with the materials that they need to become successful, and let them choose their path, their own self, and allow them to choose what they want to teach. Instead of just limiting and restricting them to what needs to be taught, let them pick what they are strong at and teach that.

Bria's response pointed to a potential opportunity gap between students who school personnel viewed as having the ability to teach and those who did not. She believed Black students had strengths that qualified them to teach, but they needed encouragement, support, and resources to pursue their goal of teaching. Study data suggest such assistance includes academic support, professional guidance related to becoming a teacher and direct (or witnessed) experience with the qualities of a "good" teacher, as participants described.

As previously discussed, the ways participants were treated in schools impacted their views of the teaching profession and, thereby, their interest in pursuing teaching as a career. Participants shared multiple experiences with and observations of racialized mistreatment from their teachers and other staff members, most of whom were white. They also discussed how important and meaningful it was for Black students to have both Black and white teachers who supported and encouraged them to pursue their goals. Importantly, participants indicated that Black students may not develop interest in the teaching profession if, throughout their schooling, they had unfavorable interpersonal relationships with their teachers and were victims of negative

stereotypes. These negative stereotypes may result in teachers assuming Black students, especially Black boys, do not have the presumed necessary skills set to become a teacher in the future, and teachers may act on these stereotypes in ways that discourage Black students from pursuing a teaching career. Overall, participants' observations imply Black students may be more inclined to pursue teaching if teachers and other school staff members provide them with equitable and encouraging schooling experiences, including positive interpersonal relationships with teachers and staff.

Through how teachers are treated and what they say about it

Nobody likes coming into a classroom and seeing a miserable teacher, you know?- Ahlayah

Previous findings revealed that teachers' verbal and nonverbal communication about their job satisfaction impacted participants' view of the desirability and viability of the teaching profession. Participants reported having frequently heard teachers mention that the amount of work they did was not commensurate with their pay, they were dissatisfied with the amount of support they received from their administrators, and they hated their jobs. Participants also reported how Black teachers were treated poorly by white parents and school administrators. In response, participants believed one way to attract Black students to teaching was by sufficiently supporting teachers, especially Black teachers, so that when they spoke about the teaching profession, they could speak honestly about the positive aspects of their careers.

Ahlayah, the participant who had the most Black teachers, explained a direct correlation between support for Black teachers and recruiting Black students into teaching. He stated an important aspect of encouraging more Black students to teach is,

> Support for the Black teachers you do get in the schools so they can keep influencing the next generation. Because let's say you are in school, and you see Mr. Black Guy, right, as

> a little Black kid, and he talking bout, 'Man, I don't wanna be here. I don't wanna be no teacher, no more.' Like you're obviously not gonna want to be a teacher. You're obviously not gonna want to follow after him if he looks all upset.

As previous findings explained, participants were deterred from teaching because of what they heard from teachers and witnessed through observing teachers, particularly Black teachers, in school. In the quote above, Ahlayah described how a Black teacher who verbalizes his frustrations about his work experience can deter Black students from teaching. Ahlayah suggested that to recruit Black students into teaching, it is particularly important to ensure Black teachers feel supported in their work because the way Black teachers talk about teaching matters to Black students.

Bria said she heard teachers mention they did not receive adequate support from school administrators and expressed the following sentiments,

> [Teachers] also said that there's no support. The principals don't have their backs in situations. They can't do what they want. Everything is restricted. So, it just makes me feel like my theory was correct and I don't want to be a teacher.

The verbal confirmation Bria received from teachers regarding her theories about the negative aspects of teaching solidified her decision to pursue a different career. In addition, Bria illuminated specific ways teachers wanted to be supported, including support from principals during conflicts (e.g., with white parents) and autonomy (e.g., over pedagogy and curriculum). Tiffany shared a similar sentiment about lack of support from administrators that contributes to teachers' job dissatisfaction, stating, "so you get more work, not very much pay, and you're not getting a lot of support from these admin [administrators]. And so, I think that's just why they [teachers] quit, and I can understand that."

Joe added that when teachers, especially Black teachers in his district, quit, Black students internalized negative views of the profession. He stated,

> A lot of black teachers that me and him [Ahlayah] see go through our school, they mainly quit. So, [Black] students see the teachers resign their positions, and I don't think that's a good influence on them. They definitely don't like seeing that. Especially when it's a teacher that they like, and I think that's when they're like, 'Yep, this is not for me.'

Joe suggested that, in his experience, some of the teachers who resigned were favored by Black students. This indicates that Black students are particularly sensitive to and impacted by the experiences of Black teachers they view as "good teachers." As stated by Tiffany, Black teachers may be pushed out due to being overworked, underpaid, and not supported by their administrators.

Notably, when participants were asked what they heard teachers say about their jobs, most recalled only negative comments. Joe explained that at his school, very few teachers discussed positive aspects of teaching with students. He said students often overheard teachers talking about difficult student behaviors and low pay, and this led students to believe, "they're [teachers are] not really trying to influence people to become teachers either, simply because they'll [students will] get it from the negatives instead of the positive side of it." Joe explained that when teachers only spoke negatively about the profession, they discourage students from becoming teachers.

Ahlayah stated, "no one likes crying at work," to emphasize Black students' desire for a good work environment. As previously reported, participants listened to what teachers, especially on Black teachers, said about teaching, which was largely negative. These negative messages about teaching were among the reasons three of the six participants decided not to

pursue a teaching career. Participants strongly believed that administrators must support teachers, especially Black teachers, and create positive work environments. Furthermore, participants heard teachers repeatedly complain that they were not paid enough for the amount of work their jobs required. Their comments suggest that if teachers feel supported and are paid at a rate that is commensurate with their workload, they may have more positive things to say about their jobs and, therefore, encourage more Black students to pursue teaching.

Through opportunities to practice and learn about teaching

When my teachers would do the little, 'come up here and teach the class about a subject,' I loved things like that. -Britney

Participants who planned to pursue teaching as a career - Ahlayah, Joe, and Tiffany - all participated in teacher preparation programs (TPP) through their respective high schools. Ahlayah's and Joe's program focused on teaching, broadly, whereas Tiffany's program had a specific focus on early childhood education. Both programs were part of their respective district's Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings. In addition, during the summer, Ahlayah and Joe participated in a three-week teacher preparation institute geared toward high school students of color in the surrounding area. The summer institute was a residential program held on the campus of a historically Black, land-grant university in their Mid-Atlantic state. The three participants who planned to teach shared that their participation in TPPs motivated or solidified their desire to teach. Participants who did not plan to teach also emphasized how practical teaching experience, like those offered through TPPs, might encourage Black high school students to choose teaching as a career.

Tiffany, who participated in an early childhood teacher preparation program, talked about how her TPP activated her desire to teach as a career. She recalls,

> [The TPP] was gonna be like a hobby, as a cool class to do…It was never really about teaching in the beginning for me…my sophomore year was when I started to get more and more passionate about it. I started working in classroom environments and making lesson plans and actually teaching my lesson plans…And so I was like, I don't know, this is kind of really cool.

Tiffany emphasized the impact of practical learning on her desire to pursue teaching. Her opportunity to assume the role of a teacher made her passionate about teaching, and she ultimately decided to pursue teaching as a career.

When asked what the school system could do to encourage more Black students to teach, Britney, who planned to pursue a non-teaching career, also emphasized the importance of teaching apprenticeship opportunities. She suggested,

> I think it would be cool to kind of give them [Black students] that immersive experience…I think it would just be important to have that aspect of teaching, like, hands on actual 1 on 1, 1 to 21 ratio, or whatever. Rather than them just being like, 'Hey, you can be a teacher.' Like, show them what it's like to be a teacher and why they should want to be a teacher.

Although participants had observed their teachers for at least twelve years, Britney suggested hands-on experience would make Black students aware of different aspects of and give them a positive view of teaching. Joe also implied the apprenticeship opportunities in which he participated were useful and may encourage more Black students to become teachers, stating,

> Because our [TPP] class, we had an apprenticeship opportunity, I actually had like three of them so far…I feel like if they suggest that more to [Black] students, I think it would

> kind of push them in the direction of, not only being a childcare worker, but also wanting to teach children certain things that they like.

Joe indicated that apprenticeship models, like those provided through his TPP, were not sufficiently advertised to Black students. Devin and Britney also noted that TPP programs were not being suggested to Black students in their school.

When asked why there were few Black students in the TPP at her school, Britney stated, "I feel like there's not much being done to make it seem like those opportunities are open for all students. Even though they say they're open, they don't reflect that." Her observation connects to colorblindness in teacher preparation whereby Black students are not explicitly recommended by teachers and counselors for participation and therefore may be unaware of the possibility. Devin explained his plan to recruit more Black students into the teaching profession through a TPP and, like Britney, noted that Black students were not made aware of such opportunities already available at their schools. He suggested school systems should,

> Provide more opportunities for [Black] students to actually see how it is being a teacher. I don't really see too much, I know there's like a [teacher preparation program], or something, there's some type of program, but it really wasn't displayed enough for [Black] students to see the opportunity… like I can say for myself, just based off the teachers I've had or the teachers I've interacted with, they haven't showed me anything to want me to be a teacher. So, I feel like, if there was more opportunities for [Black students] to see how it [teaching] actually is from multiple teachers' point of view…then maybe they will see how it really is and how much control you have as a teacher or things like that. Maybe that could encourage them or influence them to actually want to become a teacher.

Devin, who had no Black teachers during high school, was drawing from experiences with the mostly white teachers with whom he interacted. Devin went on to say he was confident that more Black students would participate in a TPP, "if it was led by Black teachers." Devin implied that if Black students had more examples of Black teachers leading through a TPP, Black students might see "how it really is" and "how much control you have as a teacher." His assertion appears to align with previous findings related to how Black students are deterred from teaching due to their experiences with white teachers' inability to control classroom behaviors.

Tiffany talked about how it was hard to hire Black teachers if there were not many Black people studying education in college. She rejected colorblind approaches to teacher preparation and suggested implementing a high school TPP that specifically targeted Black students. Tiffany explained her strategy to increase the number of Black students who want to teach, stating,

> Maybe they should implement a [TPP] program similar to the one that I was in, but for Black students… So that way, there is a larger pool to select from. Because I don't think it really is that easy to hire Black teachers if there isn't a large pool of them, you know? …So, if we have these clubs and programs that help Black students see what they could do in the future, it can increase that number of those who are applying and going to school [college] for it.

Tiffany suggested that to increase the number of prospective Black teachers, her district should create teacher preparation programs specifically geared toward Black K-12 students with an understanding that such programs would increase the number of Black students who apply to and enroll in undergraduate teacher education programs.

Participants were confident that giving Black students the opportunity to study and practice teaching through an apprenticeship model would increase the number of Black students

who pursue teaching as a career. They believed that hands-on experience with students and the opportunity to learn from a diverse group of teachers may help garner more interest in teaching among Black students. Although most participants were aware that TPPs existed, they recognized a racial gap in information about and opportunities to engage in these programs that disadvantaged Black students in their schools. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of intentionally recruiting Black students into TPPs that already exist and creating new programs specifically geared toward Black K-12 students.

By emphasizing and imagining Black teachers' potential impact

I did consider being a teacher for a little bit because I wanted to be the teacher that students felt like they could come to -Britney

As previously stated, most participants were drawn to the teaching profession because they desired to make an impact on the marginalized groups and communities to which they belonged. For example, Ahlayah, who wanted to teach in his hometown, stated,

> I want to be able to teach, then years later, those same kids that I tried to help raise, I want to be able to see them have kids, or start a job, and feel deep down in my heart that maybe I had a part in that.

Ahlayah drew on his beliefs about and experiences of “good teachers” as parent-figures when he explained his desire to "help raise" his future students. His speculations about the intrinsic rewards of teaching points to the importance of appealing to Black students' desire to make an impact when attempting to recruit them into the teaching profession. When participants suggested ways to invite their Black peers to consider teaching, some directly referenced the negative experiences of Black students and Black teachers. For example, Tiffany said she would appeal to her Black peers by explaining,

> There's not a lot of us [Black individuals] like represented in the school system, and then think about how you felt in school, and how you probably didn't feel like your voice was heard, and you, being that teacher, could set or pave a new road for students who are Black and how they might feel more comfortable in school settings…if you felt some type of way in elementary, wouldn't you have wished that there was somebody like yourself, who looked like you, that could have helped you?

Tiffany's quote connects to the previous finding that participants, and Black students in schools with few Black teachers, more generally, did not have space to process racialized incidents in school and their voices were not heard. Tiffany suggested Black students understand the benefit of having a teacher who shares their racial identity and understands their experiences. Therefore, she believed Black students would choose to teach if they believed they could become a teacher who listens to and mentors Black students as they process their racialized and negative experiences in school.

Similarly, Joe explained he would appeal to his Black peers' previous schooling experiences and implore them to become a teacher who makes an impact on students like themselves. He described the following scenario:

> So, there are some [Black] kids who currently skip a lot of their classes at my school, but a lot of them go into certain classrooms when they skip…They leave their current class to go to different classrooms. And I think the argument I would make to them is, if they said that they didn't want to be a teacher, I would say, 'You see how you're not in your current class right now, but you left to go to a different one? Wouldn't you want to be the teacher that other students in school can go to in those kind of days?'

Joe observed how, in skipping class, Black students sought solace from supportive teachers and highlighted the importance of teachers who support and develop positive interpersonal relationships with Black students.

As discussed in the previous section, these participants desired to teach because they wanted to make an impact on socially marginalized students. Their recommendations for recruiting other Black students into teaching evoked common, direct and witnessed, experiences of Black students in school, such as being unheard or seeking non-academic support from a trusted adult. Based on these experiences, participants implored that Black K-12 students imagine the impact they could have as a teacher for future students who have those same experiences.

Summary

Participants' experiences in school and their goals for the future led them to suggestions for encouraging Black high school students to consider teaching as a viable career. The suggestions were all school-based and rooted in interpersonal relationships and practical experience. All participants provided specific action steps that could be taken by school staff to spark interest and recruit Black students into teaching, and these action steps centered around four themes.

The first theme emphasized that Black students' desire to teach is influenced by their interpersonal relationships with school staff and their classroom experiences. Some participants believed Black students would be more inclined to embrace teaching as a possible profession if they had more positive experiences with teachers, beginning at a young age. In this and previous chapters, participants expressed concern about Black students, especially Black boys, being negatively stereotyped by teachers, particularly white teachers. They suggest students have

internalized these negative stereotypes and been discouraged from pursuing teaching as a career. Therefore, participants believed Black students who have positive, supportive, relationships with teachers and other school leaders will be more likely to consider teaching as a possible career.

In addition, participants drew attention to how teachers, especially Black teachers, were treated in schools and how teachers communicated their job satisfaction with students. Some participants believed Black students would be more likely to consider teaching if they observed and heard about teachers' positive experiences in school. As discussed previously, participants witnessed teachers being dissatisfied with or quitting their jobs because they were overworked, underpaid, and did not receive the support they needed from school administrators. Participants recognized the impact these experiences had on Black students' desire to pursue teaching and suggested that if teachers feel supported and properly compensated, they may communicate job satisfaction to their students thereby increasing the likelihood that students will see teaching as a desirable profession.

All participants had access to a free teacher preparation program through their high school, however only the three students who planned to teach participated in the program. Five participants believed the high school TPPs were an important way to garner interest in teaching among Black students. Specifically, they emphasized the practice-based component of the TPP as most important when attracting Black students to teaching. Participants recognized TPP programs were being under-utilized by Black students and suggested two possible solutions to give Black students access and opportunity to practice teaching. Three students suggested these programs should be advertised to Black students more effectively, and one student suggested a new high school TPP should be created for Black students specifically.

Finally, participants recognized their own and other Black students' desire to make an impact on their communities and suggested appealing to that desire to convince Black students to pursue teaching. Participants believed Black students would be drawn to teaching if they were reminded of their school experiences and encouraged to become a teacher who can help Black students who have felt silenced or have had other negative experiences in school.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on illuminating factors that attracted participants to or deterred them from teaching and their proposed solutions for attracting more Black high school students to the teaching profession. Although three students were eventually deterred from teaching, all students were attracted to teaching at some point in time. Most participants were drawn to teaching because they had a desire to make an impact on their communities. They wanted to address needs they saw in their local communities or among a marginalized group with whom they identified. Therefore, when they were tasked with creating solutions for Black high school students' lack of interest in teaching, participants who planned to teach suggested imploring Black students to tap into this same desire to uplift their communities, assuming this desire might overshadow Black students' negative perceptions of teaching.

Participants drew on their relationships with their (mostly white) teachers, the relationships they witnessed between their Black peers and white teachers, and the experiences of Black teachers to explain their own deterrents, or speculate about why their Black peers were deterred from teaching. A major deterrent was witnessing non-Black teachers' inability to foster a positive classroom environment and effectively manage students’ behaviors. They explained that Black students did not want to become like these teachers. However, students who participated in

high school teacher preparation programs were not deterred by student misbehavior and, instead, brainstormed strategies for managing classroom behaviors as a future teacher. As such, most participants suggested high school teacher preparation programs with a practical component is an effective method to attract more Black students to teaching, and they stressed the importance of intentionally recruiting Black students into these programs or creating programs specifically designed for Black students.

Finally, participants were deterred from teaching because they witnessed and experienced anti-Black harm inflicted on Black students and teachers by white teachers, white parents, and administrators. As described in this and the previous chapter, these harms included racialized microaggressions, negative stereotypes, verbal attacks, and hyper-surveillance. Not surprisingly, participants suggested exposure to positive aspects of the teaching profession would attract more Black students to teaching as a profession. However, such exposure would require white teachers to be willing and prepared to build caring interpersonal relationships with Black students and for school leaders to create positive work environments for Black teachers. School leaders must move toward a school environment that is intentionally anti-racist by implementing policy and practice designed to produce racial equity among both students and staff.

The next chapter will summarize these findings in relation to the research questions, conceptual framework, and relevant literature. I will also provide strengths and limitations to the current study followed by implications, based on the findings, for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Implications

The findings from the previous chapters provide insight into six Black, rural high school students' decisions to pursue or not pursue teaching as a profession. Their stories, along with existing literature, illuminated three overarching themes that can help teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and researchers gain a better understanding of the Black teacher pipeline. In summary, these findings reveal that positive student-teacher relationships are crucial, teachers' job satisfaction matters, and high school teacher preparation programs make a difference. This chapter will expound on those themes using findings from this study and existing literature. I will begin with a brief overview of the study purpose, followed by a critical analysis of the conceptual framework that guided my research. Then, I will discuss these three themes in connection with relevant literature. Finally, I will explain the limitations of this study and implications for practitioners, policymakers, and future research.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing literature on the Black teacher pipeline to more effectively address the lack of Black teachers in K-12 education. There are several studies describing Black in-service and pre-service teachers' motivations and concerns regarding teaching. There are also numerous studies on K-12 students' attractors to and deterrents from teaching; however, very few of these studies approach this topic from Black students' perspectives. Due to the prevalence of systemic and anti-Black racism in the US, broadly, and in K-12 schools specifically (Neal-Stanley et al., 2024; ross, 2019), it was important to approach this study through a framework centering race and teaching. The next section contains a critical analysis of this framework, including strengths, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Critical analysis of conceptual framework

The conceptual framework I used to study Black high school students' attractors to and deterrents from teaching contained components from Lortie's (2020) and Watt and Richardson's (2007) attractors to teaching models found in studies with Black high school students. I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) to complicate these colorblind frameworks that, on their own, may not be attentive to Black youths' decision-making processes. A strength of my framework is that it assumes Black students make their career decisions as they exist in an anti-Black world, navigate racist institutions, and work to overcome political and economic realities reinforced by racism. Attention to the endemic nature of racism and whiteness as property are particularly useful when analyzing Black students' experiences in schools led by white teachers and administrators.

Attention to out-of-school factors was important, especially as Black students are more likely than white students to deal with out-of-school stressors that impact their future career choices, due to structural racism. Furthermore, since Black teachers often enter the profession with the primary goal of contributing to their community and uplifting Black students specifically (Duncan, 2020), it would have been helpful to gain a better understanding of how study participants were already engaged with Black youth outside of school. For example, the current framework does not draw attention to community service, mentoring, working with Black youth in the community, or other opportunities to develop an interest in leading young people and giving back to the community. In addition, Black students attending white-led institutions may develop their critical consciousness through their communities outside of school. Given that five participants in this study expressed interest in supporting a marginalized community through their future job, this framework could better address how and where students

develop their critical consciousness and whether that has an impact on the social utility value they place on teaching.

The in-school dimension of the framework focused on how Black students' teaching and learning experiences with both Black and white teachers impacted their decision-making processes. While it was important to draw attention to the race of the teachers with whom participants frequently interacted, in the future it may be necessary to separate the impact of their experiences with Black and white teachers to better understand how racial representation among teachers effects Black students' decisions to teach. One participant in this study drew attention to Black teachers who "look Black but don't feel Black," bringing nuance to the conversation about Black teachers serving as role models for Black students (Irvine, 1989; Klopfenstein, 2005). In addition, I expected participants to talk about culturally sustaining curricula, but they did not express concern over that aspect of pedagogy. Participants did, however, draw attention to negative racial stereotypes and low expectations regarding Black students' academic achievement, factors related to anti-Blackness among teachers and sustained by structural racism through policy such as academic tracking, which helps maintain de facto segregation within schools.

Participants in this study explained their decisions to pursue teaching as a combination of in-school factors that were not limited to their personal interactions with teachers. For example, every participant told stories explaining how their peers' experiences with teachers shaped their perceptions of the teaching profession. Especially as it relates to racist incidents, my findings suggest Black students may experience second-hand racism as they witness their peers' and Black teachers' experiences (Howard & Hu, 2024). Therefore, a future framework should be attentive to both what Black students experience and what they witness. The entire school

community should be considered, not just their direct interactions with teachers. Interactions with administration should also be included. It is important to move beyond direct contact with teachers because when Black students consider teaching, they not only consider what it would be like to work with students, they also consider what it would be like to work in a school environment.

Unlike Watt and Richardson's (2007) model, my framework does not primarily focus on students who choose teaching. A strength of this composite framework is that it will also help researchers understand factors leading to Black students' disinterest in teaching. As described in a previous chapter, it is not always effective to assume a deterrent is the contrapositive of an attractor, or vice-versa. Furthermore, this framework helps to explicate how students with similar experiences, in and out of school, might draw different conclusions about the appeal of the teaching profession. For example, my findings suggest some Black students are deterred from teaching because they had few Black teachers to set an example for them, and some Black students are drawn to teaching because they had few Black teachers and want to increase that number for future students. In addition, while some students are pushed away from teaching, others are drawn toward a career they find more appealing. This framework could be improved by attending to the factors that draw students to different career paths. For example, if researchers find that Black students who previously considered teaching are drawn to careers that allow them to work from home, we may focus our efforts on educating Black students about the possibilities of becoming a professor who has more autonomy over their schedule.

Finally, this framework encourages the use of counter-narratives from Black students. Their narratives bring nuance to some assumptions about the viability of teaching among Black students. For example, as in prior research, most participants in this study shared their perception

that teachers receive a low salary (Graham & Erwin, 2011), however this was not a primary deterrent for any of them. Furthermore, their stories bring to light more than just the presence of racism, but also the ways in which it impacted their decisions. Researchers still have so much to discover about Black students' relationships with teaching, and this framework allows space to uncover more of what we do not yet know.

On being Black and Rural

These data highlight counter-stories from Black, rural, students living outside of the southern US regarding their experiences in schools and their perceptions of teaching. Black, rural, students' experiences often gone unheard amidst education research with Black students or rural individuals (Ruggiano, 2022). Participants' narratives at the intersection of Blackness in a predominantly white space and rurality provided insight into racialized barriers that should be addressed in future policy and practice. For example, since rural students live far from any major metropolitan area, they have less opportunities to witness or be mentored by Black professionals, like teachers, than Black students in urban or suburban regions. In addition, since rural regions often have a lower rate of educational attainment than urban or suburban areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), a professional job like teaching may be particularly beneficial for Black students' who seek to bolster their socio-economic status.

Discussion of Findings

In light of the conceptual framework detailed above, this study was driven by two critical questions:

(1) How do the K-12 experiences of rural, Black high school juniors and seniors influence their decisions to pursue or not pursue K-12 teaching as a career path?

(2) How can study participants' experiences and understandings inform strategies for increasing the number of Black high school students who pursue K-12 teaching as a viable career path?

My analyses of the data in this exploration uncovered three important themes that should guide future research and practice regarding Black, rural, high school students and the teacher pipeline: (1) positive student-teacher relationships are crucial, (2) teachers' job satisfaction matters, and (3) high school teacher preparation programs can make a difference. This section will explain how these findings align with current literature on Black students who do or do not pursue teaching.

Positive student-teacher relationships are crucial

Aligned with literature on Black students' perceptions of the teaching profession, study participants' deterrents to teaching were primarily centered around negative interactions with their teachers or witnessing negative interactions between their teachers and other Black students. Black students cite discriminatory treatment, negative stereotypes, low expectations, microaggressions, and other negative schooling experiences as influential in developing their perceptions of teachers and, ultimately, their rejection of teaching as a possible career (Graham & Erwin, 2011; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Bianco et al., 2011). Participants in this study primarily had white teachers; therefore, their own and other Blacks students' relationships with their white teachers were paramount in their decision-making processes.

Due to the endemic nature of racism and the prevalence of anti-Blackness (Dumas & ross, 2016), Black students who manage to avoid interpersonal racist encounters may still experience second-hand harm as they witness those encounters among their peers in school (Howard & Hu, 2024). My findings suggest these vicarious experiences of racism are just as

important Black students' decisions about teaching as their own interactions with white teachers. For example, a female participant who never talked about instances of interpersonal racism between herself and a white teacher cited stereotypes about Black boys and racist treatment of Black teachers as deterrents to teaching. Concerning Black boys, her observations are consistent with prior research on Black male high school students' intent to teach, in which participants cite teachers' racial biases (Marrun et al., 2021; Graham & Erwin, 2011). In the present study, findings on Black students' disinterest in teaching complicates Lortie's (2020) assertion that people who have positive schooling experiences are more likely to teach, and draws attention to the impact on Black students when they witness their Black classmates experiencing anti-Black and racist harm.

Black students often choose between emulating the teachers they have or becoming the teacher they wish they had. As they witness white teachers' inability to create positive rapport with students, Black students may be unable to imagine themselves performing a similar role. Thus, they may abandon the idea of teaching because they never experienced the type of teacher they would hope to become. Some students do not aspire to become the teacher they wish they had, nor should that be the expectation. However, due to the systematic removal of Black teachers after Brown v. Board (Fenwick, 2022) and the implementation of teacher certification barriers through testing (Fenwick, 2021), there are very few Black teachers who Black students can turn to as role models in teaching.

Often it takes extra and intentional effort for white teachers to build positive rapport with Black students with whom they do not share a culture (Parsons, 2005), but participants cited white teachers who rose to the occasion. It is important for white teachers to model good teaching through their positive relationships with Black students. When teachers develop positive

relationships with their students, they are more likely to see the good in them and to see their potential, even their potential as future educators. As white teachers abandon stereotypes of and low expectations for Black students, they may begin to notice students' soft skills like leadership, creativity, and interpersonal skills; qualities aligned with Black students' descriptions of their favorite teachers. Some teachers must reevaluate their criteria for what makes a student a good potential candidate for the teaching profession and encourage more Black students toward the profession.

Participants spoke highly of their favorite teachers, many of whom were white. These teachers had an impact on their lives through positive interpersonal relationships centered around other-parenting and emotional support. Perhaps, due to these interactions, participants understood the potential impact teachers can have on students' lives. Similar to other studies, participants in this study believed teaching was a respectable job (Graham & Erwin, 2011; Smith et al., 2004), and they did not view low pay as indicative of a lack of personal respect for the profession. Similar to findings in Graham and Erwin' (2011) research, although participants in the present study talked about low pay, their perceptions of teaching were influenced more by how they and other Black students were treated in school. These findings speak to the necessity for more research on what deters high school students from teaching as compared to college students and adults (Leech et al., 2019).

Finally, in an age where technology allows us to form virtual connections, youth may crave human connection, including with adults. The young people in this study valued authentic connections with their teachers through interpersonal relationships. bell hooks (1994) reminds us that teachers should show up wholly in mind, body, and spirit, sharing our personal experiences, feelings, and passions during class because that resonates with students and humanizes the

profession. How can we expect students to see themselves as teachers if they only see teachers as "disembodied spirits" (hooks, 1994, p. 193)? When students are surprised to see their teacher at the grocery store, that may be an indication that the teacher has not authentically humanized their presence in the classroom. Positive and authentic relationships with teachers of every race are important as Black students decide whether or not to pursue teaching as a career.

Teachers' job satisfaction matters

Participants in this study recounted negative messages from their teachers regarding their job satisfaction. What students heard from teachers largely centered on teachers' dissatisfaction with the support they received from administrators, their inability to manage adverse student behaviors, and their inadequate pay. Furthermore, students recognized teachers' lack of autonomy over pedagogy (e.g. Devin said Black teachers quit because "maybe they teach a different way") and curriculum (e.g. Britney talked about recently banned books). Although participants' observations referred to teachers, broadly, they also align with literature on school systems' inability to retain Black teachers, particularly the work of Partee (2014). Teachers should be able to speak freely and authentically about their jobs while they are at work. However, if their perceptions of their jobs are largely negative, communicating those perceptions can deter students from becoming teachers. Therefore, it is vital that teachers feel supported and valued in the workplace.

Additionally, as participants have had very few experiences with Black teachers, most could not gauge Black teachers' job satisfaction, specifically. From their limited experience, however, they described Black teachers as being disregarded by administrators and disrespected by white parents. Similar to participants in Graham and Erwin's (2011) study, participants

suggested that Black students are deterred from teaching because of white parents' disrespectful behavior toward Black teachers.

Interestingly, participants did not mention Black teachers being disproportionately called upon as disciplinarians, like some research asserts (Brockenbrough, 2018; Brown, 2012). This finding may have been due to participants' limited experience with Black teachers. However, participants alluded to other distinctly disciplinary positions in the schools (e.g., hall patrol) that were occupied by primarily Black adults, perhaps decreasing the need to call on Black teachers as disciplinarians in their schools.

Simply put, in addition to the information about job dissatisfaction Black students may gather from their teachers, my findings suggest they also witness the very few Black teachers in their schools experiencing anti-Black and racist harm. For example, consistent with research showing Black teachers quit at higher rates than white teachers (Achinstein et al., 2010), Joe noticed that a lot of Black teachers at his school had "mainly quit," and he recognized the negative impact that had on Black students' decisions to teach. Black students are impacted by teachers' expressed dissatisfaction with their job and the mistreatment and persistence of the few Black teachers in their buildings. As Love (2023) asserts, any Black teacher recruitment strategy must begin with a good Black teacher retention plan: a plan that better supports and improves the working conditions of Black teachers.

High school teacher preparation programs make a difference

The three study participants who participated in a teacher preparation program said the program solidified or sparked their interest in teaching as a future career. At the time of the study, only one participant had completed the internship portion of the program and the other two based their assessments on coursework alone. The students who did not decide to teach had

each been interested in teaching, which raises the question of whether an early intervention through teacher preparation could have helped to maintain their interest in a teaching career (Wong, 1994).

Research literature on teacher preparation for Black high school students is scant, however, this study illuminates possibilities regarding their potential effectiveness with Black students. For example, similar to findings in Marrun et al.'s (2021) research, students in this study suggested targeted recruitment for Black students into these programs. Participants inferred that Black students would show more interest in teaching if they were encouraged to participate in such programs and alluded to an opportunity gap (Milner, 2012a) between white and Black students regarding participation. At present, there is no clear evidence that Black students participate in these programs at a disproportionate rate, as compared to white students. However, my data suggest teachers' racial biases and stereotypes may hinder some teachers' ability to notice Black students' potential and encourage them to participate in teacher preparation programs. Recruitment efforts that specifically targeted Black students are essential because colorblind approaches uphold the status quo and, thus far, appear to have little bearing on the number of Black K-12 teachers. As Fenwick (2021; 2022) points out, the dearth of Black people in the teaching profession is not incidental; rather, it is a result of racist policies. Therefore, remedying this problem will require racialized intention.

These findings indicate that teacher preparation programs must go beyond the typical, Eurocentric teacher preparation that occurs in most predominantly white institutions (Sleeter, 2017). Again, without attention to race in teacher preparation curriculum and instruction, we will continue to reproduce the current prevalence of white female teachers for whom teacher education is designed (Villegas & Davis, 2008). My study findings illuminate a few key factors

that might help us create programs that meet the needs of Black students and encourage them to pursue teaching as a career. For example, participants in this study did not have a space to make sense of their racialized experiences in schools. Goings and Bianco (2016) and Bianco et al. (2011) indicate the importance of such spaces. The Pathways2Teaching program described in their studies highlight the need for students of color to be able to,

> Critically examine the complex historical and contemporary educational issues of inequity that exist in underserved communities that disproportionately affect students of color – the very issues that have contributed to the marginalization and disenfranchisement that our students have experienced in schools (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019, p. 40).

Furthermore, (Witmer & Wimer, 2022) suggest if policymakers use Black students' perceptions and experiences to help shape curricula for teacher preparation programs, they might prioritize culturally relevant experiences that "increase a sense of belonging" among Black students instead of "fitting students into prescribed curriculum" (p. 973). Thus, findings from this and prior research indicates that Black students in white educational spaces need opportunities to make sense of their racialized experiences in schools, and teacher preparation programs that are attentive to this need can be an intentional space in which Black students are guided through historical and contemporary racialized issues that have impacted their schooling experiences.

Finally, findings from this study were consistent with literature showing that Black individuals often enter the teaching profession because they have a desire to uplift their communities (Achinstein et al., 2010; Dixson & Anderson, 2017; Foster, 1997). Therefore, teacher preparation programs seeking to recruit Black students might appeal to that desire through their curricula. For example, the statewide teacher preparation program in the mid-

Atlantic state in which the present study was conducted, in a course centered on various aspects of the teaching profession, devotes only two days to the history of racial inequity in the US. Perhaps Black students would be more interested and persist in teacher preparation programs if the curricula gave more attention to issues they feel are most important and relevant to their own schooling experiences and to their concerns about and desires for becoming teachers. Furthermore, participants in this study suggested prospective teachers should have hands-on experience during their high school teacher preparation programs, which will directly connect them with students, in a teaching capacity, and give them a concrete sense of teaching and their future promise as teachers. The importance study participants placed on "hands-on" experiences, corroborates Goings and Bianco (2016) assertion that direct teaching experiences, like tutoring and mentoring younger students, have a positive influence on Black K-12 students' decisions to pursue teaching.

Study Limitations and Strengths

The limitations of this study are related to its sample size and study location. This study included six students, a relatively small sample that will not produce generalizable results. Furthermore, participants in this study were self-selected and reported having participated in Honors level and Advanced Placement coursework and never faced exclusionary discipline in school. Their experiences differ from the bulk of research on how Black K-12 students are underrepresented in high level courses (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017) and are disproportionately disciplined in school (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). In addition, participants were drawn from one rural region. Therefore, my findings may not reflect Black rural high school students' experiences and career decision-making processes, more broadly, or those of Black students in

urban and suburban school districts. However, many of my findings align with previous studies on Black, K-12 students' perceptions of teaching. Further, given the dearth of studies on perceptions of teaching among Black students in rural areas, my research has important contextual implications for the broader body of literature on why Black students may pursue or reject a career in teaching. Lastly, much qualitative research on Black K-12 students' intent to teach, focuses on Black male youth (Graham & Erwin, 2011; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Smith et al., 2004). Although the present study does not analyze gender differences, given the small sample size, it provides valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of Black girls, whose voices need more attention.

Implications

Wake up all the teachers, time to teach a new way. Maybe then they'll listen to whatcha have to say. 'Cause they're the ones who's comin' up and the world is in their hands. When you teach the children, teach 'em the very best you can (Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes, 1975)

The current teacher pipeline in the US continues to reproduce a teaching workforce that primarily consists of white women. Given the shortage of teachers, broadly, there is a desperate need to increase interest and remove barriers for Black individuals to pursue teaching as a career. The findings in this study specifically address how teachers, teacher education, and the teaching profession impact Black high school students' desire to teach. This section provides implications and recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who seek to gain a better understanding of Black students' decision-making processes and increase the number of Black high school students who desire to teach.

For Practitioners

These findings reveal Black teachers, non-Black teachers, and school administrators have an impact on Black students' perceptions of teachers and teaching. All of these adults in schools have a role to play, and I will address them separately below.

To school leaders:

Teacher recruitment does not begin when their applications hit your desk; it begins when students are walking the halls and sitting in the classrooms of your school. Be attentive to how Black students feel and experience your school. If your schools feel like a prison, why would any student want to return? If students feel harassed and degraded in school, why would they return? Furthermore, if they see Black teachers harassed and degraded by white parents, why would they join your staff? Be attentive to how Black teachers feel and experience the workplace, because Black students are imagining themselves in those roles. Give Black teachers space and time to name their particular concerns and needs. Support Black teachers who have innovative or creative ways to engage students. It is in your power to positively impact the Black teacher pipeline by first creating a good plan for retaining Black teachers.

As stated earlier, teacher recruitment begins while prospective teachers are still K-12 students, and it can consist of direct and indirect lessons about the teaching profession. Indirect lessons about teaching are communicated through teachers' interpersonal relationships with students. As a school leader, it is your job to ensure your teachers are equipped to support and care for Black students. Teachers who have never experienced a particular culture may find it difficult to connect with students from that culture. Therefore, school leaders must create opportunities for teachers to observe and be mentored by colleagues who are creating positive relationships with Black students. Ongoing professional development should consist of activities

and strategies that can be directly applied to fostering a positive and engaging classroom community for Black students.

For secondary school leaders, direct lessons about teaching can come through teacher preparation programs (TPPs). Although the district or state may control teacher preparation curricula, as school leaders, you must be intentional about who you select to teach these classes. TPP instructors must take a critical and engaging approach as they address the racialized history and contemporary circumstances that contribute to the current Black teacher shortage. High school TPPs can be a space in which Black students begin to develop their critical consciousness and make sense of their racialized experiences. As school leaders, you must ensure that the opportunity to participate in a TPP is open to all students, regardless of grades or attendance, because despite students' past academic performance, it is never too early or too late to begin to cultivate a future educator.

To non-Black teachers:

Go out of your way to love Black students. Building relationships with people outside of your culture often takes extra time and energy if you want to do it well. It will be worth it. Black students are interested in genuine relationships with adults who care for them. Black students do not need to be controlled; they need to be engaged. Therefore, be authentic in your presence and encourage your Black students to do the same. Tell the 'dad' jokes. Listen to your preferred music. Then, allow your students to tell jokes and listen to their preferred music as well. Create a classroom community built on trust and authenticity, where everyone can show up wholly in mind, body, and spirit. That trust must be built on, “collective action to acknowledge and address systemic racial inequities in the educational system” and naming, “the ways in which we have

enacted and continue to uphold racist practices and policies" (Dunn et al., 2021, p. 217), followed by a commitment to antiracist principles.

In addition, if you are unable to form positive relationships with Black students, begin by taking the time to understand important aspects of students' lives. When Black students invite you to watch them sing in the church choir, go. When they invite you to their neighborhood block party, go. When they ask if they can sit in your room during lunch, say yes. If they never ask you to do any of those things or anything similar, start by asking them. Show an interest in your students beyond their academic achievements. As you begin to know and understand your students more holistically, it will become easier to resist anti-Black narratives, believe the best about them, and push them toward their highest potential as leaders and, perhaps, future teachers.

For Black teachers:

Keep up the great work! Participants in this study boasted of Black teachers who work hard to ensure they have equitable educational experiences. They love when you keep it real with them and show up as your authentic selves at school. Continue to nurture and affirm Black students in their academic and extracurricular endeavors. It is possible that some of them are not being held to high academic standards by their other teachers, so continue to make sure they show up as their best selves in your classroom.

The Black students also notice when you experience racialized harm in school, and they know it should not be that way. Talk to them about it. Help them name and process the racialized things they see and experience in schools. Be one of their safe spaces. Help them to develop their critical consciousness even as you are still developing your own. Start now to create your future coworkers.

For Policymakers

You have the ability to create effective policy that begins to repair the systemic damage that was and is being done to Black teachers. For example, Black teachers were systematically removed from their teaching positions and testing barriers were put in place to make it difficult for Black teachers to pursue a career in teaching (Fenwick, 2021), therefore, specific race conscious policy must be created to repair that damage. Despite the current federal ban on policy that is attentive to equity, states must push back on racist policy using racially conscious solutions. I have two recommendations for strategies that might help mitigate the cyclical harm caused by unjust, racist policy with regard to the teacher workforce.

1. Create critical, socially just, and equity-focused teacher preparation programs for high school students. The history of education in this country is full of Black individuals creating something out of nothing. From this country's inception, Black people were forced to learn in fugitive spaces with few resources. Throughout history, Black scholars and teachers have proven their abilities to overcome unjust laws and policies to create freer futures. All students, not just Black students, should look to Black educators and Black schools as examples of excellence in the field. Furthermore, school districts and states should look to high school programs like Pathways2Teaching and teacher preparation programs at historically Black colleges and universities (Copridge et al., 2023) as a guide for how to effectively recruit and engage Black students in a curriculum that is justice-centered and culturally responsive. TPPs should have a practical component in which students are able to engage in social justice and equity-focused service to their communities. Finally, high school TPP classes should provide college credit at every public university in the state.

2. Provide all Black students with free college tuition after high school if they pursue teaching as a major. Black students leave college with more debt than their white peers, which impacts their decisions about where to pursue higher education and what major they choose (Mustaffa & Dawson, 2021). This financial inequity also serves to reproduce a significantly higher number of white students than Black students who can afford to pay for college and all the extra fees required for teacher certification (Chung et al., 2023). Since Black teachers were once systematically removed from teaching, affirmative action must be taken until the proportion of Black teachers is comparable to the pre-*Brown* era, at best, or congruent with the current racial demographics in the US, at least.

For future research

This exploration of the Black teacher pipeline is one of very few studies centering the perspectives of Black high school students. More qualitative research with a larger sample size needs to be conducted to further develop the themes I identified and explore other potential reasons Black students are and are not choosing to teach. Qualitative research with Black students must be attentive to race and place. Suburban, urban, and rural areas have different economies, opportunities, and political climates, therefore illuminating the need for place-based research. Furthermore, Black students navigate these spaces in which systemic racism impacts their school funding and access to Black teachers, therefore illuminating the need for research guided by theory that is attentive to race.

Future research with Black students should include students who have experienced disciplinary issues and students who are not on track to attend college. These students will provide insight regarding their relationships with teachers and schools that may not be captured by the current data. Their insights might help us to understand how teachers and school leaders

can create a positive environment in which more students are led to consider teaching. Furthermore, this study focused seniors and juniors in high school who had already solidified their decisions about teaching and their future careers. Research with younger students might provide insight on factors effecting Black students before they make a final decision about their career path. Qualitative research with younger students may also help researchers better understand the optimal time to begin formal teacher preparation.

Conclusion

There was a time in this country where teaching was a popular profession among Black adults. Currently, however, countless school districts in the US are attempting to fill the Black teacher shortage by convincing Black college students and adults to change career paths and become a teacher. Teachers, school leaders, and policy makers are missing a very large piece of the puzzle: effective Black teachers can be cultivated, not just convinced.

Unlike any other profession, Black students learn what it means to be a teacher through up-close observation nearly every day of their lives before they make their decisions about attending and majoring in college. Some Black students primarily observe teachers who do not share their culture or history, widening the gap between students' lived experiences and their teachers'. Therefore, it is important for teachers and school leaders to understand that their personal relationships and encounters with Black students directly impact the next generation of potential Black teachers. When Black students think about teaching, they remember how school personnel make them feel. What if we made sure all Black students felt loved and supported by teachers and administrators during school? What if teachers were quick to notice and affirm Black students' leadership qualities? What if Black students were encouraged to understand and experience the role teaching can play in equity and justice for marginalized youth? The most

effective Black teachers will be cultivated, beginning at a young age, through their experiences with teachers and in schools.

This dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of how Black students' experiences in schools influence their perceptions of the teaching profession as a viable career. These findings broaden the literature on Black teacher recruitment beyond the common issue of low pay. This study elevates how racialized experiences impact Black students' decision-making processes, thereby bringing to light the necessity for teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and researchers to approach Black students' recruitment into teaching through a racialized lens.

You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world. In some way, your aspirations and concern for a single man in fact do begin to change the world. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks or people look at reality, then you can change it…
Despite the odds, I want to change the world.
What I hope to convey?
Well, joy, love, the passion to feel how our choices affect the world
... that's all.
-James Baldwin
(Romano, 1979)

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Flyer

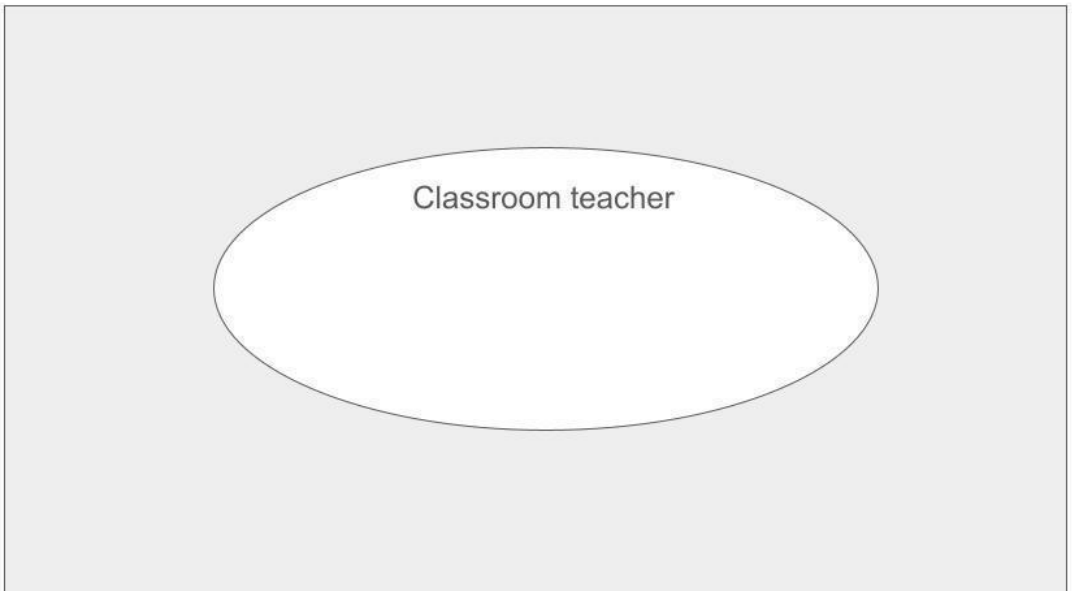
APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Protocol #1

1. How old are you?
2. Are you a rising junior or senior?
3. Where did you go for elementary, middle, high school?
4. Approximately what is your GPA?
5. Do you like school? Why/why not?
6. Do you have a favorite memory from school? Least favorite?
7. Did you ever experience any exclusionary discipline in school? (suspended, expelled, ISI)
8. Do you have an idea of what you want to do after you graduate high school?
    a. What is your plan?
    b. When you are thinking about choosing your future career, what are 2 things that are most important to you? (location, hours, pay, passion, etc…?)
    c. Have you ever considered being a teacher? (yes or no) *we will talk about this more later*
9. Is anyone in your family a teacher?
    a. If so- who?
10. Has anyone ever told you that you would make a good teacher?
    a. Who? Why did they say that?

11. How many Black teachers have you had from k-12 (not including assistants, guidance, admin etc.)?
12. Thinking back over all the teachers you know, do you have a favorite(s)?
    a. What makes this teacher stand out?
13. Thinking back over all the teachers you know, do you have a least favorite(s)?
    a. What makes this teacher stand out?

APPENDIX C: Circle Map template

Pseudonym:



APPENDIX D: Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Let's get to know each other! Tell me something fun you did this summer or something you are looking forward to this year. (8 min)
2. Circle map (10 min)
    a. I am going to have you each do something called a "circle map" (show template). Put your pseudonym at the top of the slide. Inside the circle, you are going to spend 2 minutes writing all the words you think of when you hear "classroom teacher." They can be good, bad, or neither. Any questions? Begin.
    b. Thinking about the words you wrote, in the rectangle I want you to describe why you thought about those words. I will give you 3 minutes to write a few sentences about why you thought about those words. You do not have to write about each word specifically. You can write a summary. Any questions? Begin.
    c. On your slide, I want you to highlight in green the words that are POSITIVE, highlight in red the words that are NEGATIVE, and highlight in yellow the words

that are neutral (neither positive nor negative). Any questions? Take 1 minute. Begin.

You know the purpose of my research is to understand how Black students are thinking about the teaching profession. Now we are going to go around and give everyone a chance to answer each of the next questions.

1. Tell us about some of the words on your circle map and why you chose them. (3 min each kid)
2. Xx number of you said you considered being a teacher and xx number of you said you never considered it. For those of you who have considered being a teacher, are you still considering it? Why?
    a. If not- Why did you change your mind?
    b. If you never considered it, why not?
3. Why do you think there aren't many Black teachers on the shore?
4. You all said you had xx number of Black teachers in your life. Do you think it matters if Black students have Black teachers?
    a. What are the similarities and differences between having a Black teacher versus a white teacher?
5. Anything else you want to share about why Black students in this area may or may not want to be a teacher?

APPENDIX E: Digital Collage Prompt

"If I became a teacher…"

This digital collage should be a representation of what things would be like if you decided to become a teacher. Your collage can consist of personal photos or online photos. You can also have links to or embed videos (tiktok, reels, youtube, etc). You can use any presentation platform to create you collage (powerpoint, canva, etc…). Your digital collage should address the following questions:

1. Who/What/Where/When/Why/How would you teach?

2. What would your classroom look/feel like?

3. How would teaching make you feel as a person?

You do not need to write any descriptions; I will ask you to explain your collage to me at our final individual meeting.

APPENDIX F: Individual Interview Protocol #2

4. Tell me about your collage. Why did you choose these things? How do these things relate to the reasons you do/don't want to be a teacher?

5. After reviewing the transcript from the first interview, is there anything you want to change or expand on?
6. After having our group discussion, is there anything you did not get a chance to say? Or anything you want to expand on?
7. In your opinion, what is the most important thing a teacher does?
8. What (if any) are some things you have heard teachers say about their job? Do these comments impact whether you might want to teach some day?
9. If you had to choose one teacher to teach a class on teaching, who would you choose? Why?
10. Do you think you would be a good teacher if you wanted to? Why/why not?
11. What do you think are the steps someone has to take to become a teacher? First graduate high school, then what?
12. I want to know how much you think teachers get paid every year compared to people who get paid the minimum wage. Teachers work about 8 hours per day for 5 days per week. That is 40 hours total every week. Teachers get the summer off, so they only work about 36 weeks of the year. Teachers get paid an annual salary; they do not get paid per hour (ask if they need that to be explained). If you got paid $15 per hour (MD minimum wage) and worked the same amount as a teacher, you would have an annual salary of $21,600. What do you think is the annual salary for a first-year teacher straight out of college? (just guess, no wrong answers)

APPENDIX G: Final Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer all multiple-choice questions. There is space to expand on answers if you want to. If you are confused about a question, please ask.

1. Pseudonym:

    a. Britney b. Bria c. Tiffany d. Joe e. Devin f. Ahlayah

2. What is your age?

    a. 16 b. 17 c. 18 d. 19

3. How do you identify?

    a. Male b. Female c. Non-Binary

4. What county is your high school in?

    a. District 1 b. District 2

5. Do you plan to go to college?

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes, but I HAVE NOT applied yet d. Yes, and I HAVE already applied e. Yes, and I have already been ACCEPTED

6. Teaching is a career I will pursue after high school.

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes

7. If you were offered a complete 4 year scholarship to go to college and become a teacher, would you decide to teach?

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes

8. Why/Why not?

9. If you had more Black teachers growing up, would you decide to teach?

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes

10. Why/Why not?

11. If you could teach whatever you want (i.e. do not have to stick to a curriculum), would you decide to teach?

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes

12. Why/Why not?

13. Do you think you could live a (financially) comfortable life on a teacher's salary?

a. No b. Maybe c. Yes

14. Please explain your answer above.

15. Black and white STUDENTS are treated the same at my school by teachers and administrators.

a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neutral d. Agree

e. Strongly agree f. Prefer not to answer

16. Please explain your answer above. (Give examples if you want)

17. Black and white TEACHERS are treated the same at my school by teachers and administrators.

    a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neutral d. Agree

    e. Strongly agree f. Prefer not to answer

18. Please explain your answer above. (Give examples if you want)

19. Overall, school was a positive experience for you.

    a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neutral d. Agree

    e. Strongly agree f. Prefer not to answer

20. Explain your answer above

APPENDIX H: List of Deductive Codes

In school	**Out of School**
Experiences with Black teachers	Family dis/encouragement
Experiences with white teachers	Social Messaging
Curriculum	
Messaging from teachers	Task return (status and salary)
Structural Racism	Structural Racism
Anti-Blackness	Anti-Blackness
Perceptions of the teaching profession	
Altruistic ambitions	Altruistic ambitions
Teacher dis/encouragement	
Whiteness as property	

APPENDIX I: Assent Form (under 18)

PARTICIPANT ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE (under 18)

Project Title	*Dissertation study on the reasons Black high school students do or do not pursue teaching as a career.*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Tifanee McCaskill** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Black, junior or senior in high school, who lives in a rural town in Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to elevate Black students' voices regarding the reasons they may or may not choose teaching as a viable career path and the ways*

	their public school experiences may have influenced those decisions.
Procedures	*The procedures include two 1-hour, audio and video recorded, individual interviews via zoom, one 2-hour, audio and video recorded, group interview (5 to 7 participants) via zoom, and an individual self-reflective digital collage that provides you with an opportunity to share your thoughts in private. Interview questions will focus on your plans for after high school, people or circumstances that have influenced those plans, your experiences with teachers, your thoughts about the teaching profession, and your thoughts about pursuing teaching as a viable career path. You will be made aware that the zoom meetings will be both video and audio recorded. If you do not wish to be video recorded, you will be invited to turn off your camera and participate in the study. If at any point during the interview, you decide you no longer want to be video recorded, you will have the freedom to turn your camera off as needed. If you do not want to be audio recorded, you will be invited to exit the zoom meeting.*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*Although the researcher will attempt to minimize risk, there is potentially the risk of fatigue, boredom, discomfort, or embarrassment in the interview setting. You will not have to answer any question that might make you feel uncomfortable, you can always choose to pass. You are welcome to step away from your computer at any time or turn off your camera to avoid any discomfort. Furthermore, there is the potential risk of the loss/breach of confidentiality.*
Potential Benefits	*Participants will receive $25 for each stage of the research project that is fully completed (4 stages total). Participants do not have to complete every stage to be compensated. All money will be paid to the participants in the form of a VISA gift card at the end of the data collection.*
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secured cloud-based storage system and a password protected computer. Only Tifanee McCaskill, the principal investigator, will have access to all the data. I will be using pseudonyms to refer to you in place of your name in the stored data. Your name will be linked to your pseudonym in a separate and secure file stored on a password-protected cloud-based storage system.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You*

Withdraw and Questions	*may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or want to stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not positively or negatively impact your academic standing, grades, or relationship with your school.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Tifanee McCaskill*** ***Tifaneem@umd.edu*** ***301-615-1178***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.* For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants
Statement of Assent	*Minor Participants: Your signature indicates that you have read this assent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed assent form.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]**
	☐Check this box to consent to the interview being audio and video recorded.

	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	DATE

APPENDIX J: Consent form (18 or older)

PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE (18 and over)

Project Title	*Dissertation study on the reasons Black high school students do or do not pursue teaching as a career.*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Tifanee McCaskill** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Black, junior or senior in high school, who lives in a rural town in Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to elevate Black students' voices regarding the reasons they may or may not choose teaching as a viable career path and the ways their public school experiences may have influenced those decisions.*
Procedures	*The procedures include two 1-hour, audio and video recorded, individual interviews via zoom, one 2-hour, audio and video recorded, group interview (5 to 7 participants) via zoom, and an individual self-reflective digital collage that provides you with an opportunity to share your thoughts in private. Interview questions will focus on your plans for after high school, people or circumstances that have influenced those plans, your experiences with teachers, your thoughts about the teaching profession, and your thoughts about pursuing teaching as a viable career path. You will be made aware that the zoom meetings will be both video and audio recorded. If you do not wish to be video recorded, you will be invited to turn off your camera and participate in the study. If at any point during the interview, you decide you no longer want to be video recorded, you will have the freedom to turn your camera off as needed. If you do not want to be audio recorded, you will be invited to exit the zoom meeting.*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*Although the researcher will attempt to minimize risk, there is potentially the risk of fatigue, boredom, discomfort, or embarrassment in the interview setting. You will not have to answer any question that might make you feel uncomfortable, you can always choose to pass. You are welcome to step away from your computer at any time or turn off your camera to avoid any discomfort. Furthermore, there is the potential risk of the loss/breach of confidentiality.*

Potential Benefits	*Participants will receive $25 for each stage of the research project that is fully completed (4 stages total). Participants do not have to complete every stage to be compensated. All money will be paid to the participants in the form of a VISA gift card at the end of the data collection.*
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secured cloud-based storage system and a password protected computer. Only Tifanee McCaskill, the principal investigator, will have access to all the data. I will be using pseudonyms to refer to you in place of your name in the stored data. Your name will be linked to your pseudonym in a separate and secure file stored on a password-protected cloud-based storage system.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or want to stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not positively or negatively impact your academic standing, grades, or relationship with your school.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Tifanee McCaskill*** ***Tifaneem@umd.edu*** ***301-615-1178***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *This research has been reviewed according to the University of*

	Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]**
	☐Check this box to consent to the interview being audio and video recorded.
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

APPENDIX K: Consent form (parent permission)

PARENTAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Dissertation study on the reasons Black high school students do or do not pursue teaching as a career.*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Tifanee McCaskill** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting your child to participate in this research project because they are a Black, junior or senior in high school, who lives in a rural town in Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to elevate Black students' voices regarding the reasons they may or may not choose teaching as a viable career path and the ways their public school experiences may have influenced those decisions.*
Procedures	*The procedures include two 1-hour, audio and video recorded, individual interviews via zoom, one 2-hour, audio and video recorded, group interview (5 to 7 participants) via zoom, and an individual self-reflective digital collage that provides your child with an opportunity to share their thoughts in private. Interview questions will focus on their plans*

	for after high school, people or circumstances that have influenced those plans, their experiences with teachers, their thoughts about the teaching profession, and their thoughts about pursuing teaching as a viable career path. They will be made aware that the zoom meetings will be both video and audio recorded. If you do not wish for your child to be video recorded, they will be invited to turn off their camera and participate in the study. If at any point during the interview, they decide they no longer want to be video recorded, they will have the freedom to turn their camera off as needed. If you do not want your child to be audio recorded, they will be invited to exit the zoom meeting.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*Although the researcher will attempt to minimize risk, there is potentially the risk of fatigue, boredom, discomfort, or embarrassment in the interview setting. Your child will not have to answer any question that might make them feel uncomfortable, they can always choose to pass. Your child is welcome to step away from their computer at any time or turn off their camera to avoid any discomfort. Furthermore, there is the potential risk of the loss/breach of confidentiality.*
Potential Benefits	*Participants will receive $25 for each stage of the research project that is fully completed (4 stages total). Participants do not have to complete every stage to be compensated. All money will be paid to the participants in the form of a VISA gift card at the end of the data collection.*
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secured cloud-based storage system and a password protected computer. Only Tifanee McCaskill, the principal investigator, will have access to all the data. I will be using pseudonyms to refer to your child in place of their name in the stored data. Their name will be linked to their pseudonym in a separate and secure file stored on a password-protected cloud-based storage system.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, their identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Their information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. They may choose not to take part at all. If they decide to participate in this research, they may stop participating at any time. If they decide not to participate in this study or want to stop participating at any time, they will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which they otherwise qualify. Your child's decision to participate or not participate in this study will not positively or negatively impact their academic standing, grades, or relationship with their school.*

	If your child decides to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: ***Tifanee McCaskill*** ***Tifaneem@umd.edu*** ***301-615-1178***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.* For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to have your child participate in this research study. You may print a copy of this consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please write your name below.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF MINOR PARTICIPANT [Please Print]**
	NAME OF PARENT [please print]

	☐Check this box to consent to the interviews being audio and video recorded.	
	SIGNATURE OF PARENT	**DATE**

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