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## African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American Student Achievement Gap

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African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American  
Student Achievement Gap

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

September 2021

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September 2021

African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American  
Student Achievement Gap

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research study project is dedicated to my husband John, my mother, my siblings, my nieces, and my pastor. My mother didn't finish high school and was a single parent to the four of us, however, to me she was the smartest woman in the world. She taught us to work hard and believed in ourselves. We've come a long way, Mama. Thank you for teaching us to be of good character and work hard.

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## ABSTRACT

African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American Student Achievement Gap

by Lisa C. Broomfield

**Purpose:** The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals in Riverside County, California to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making.

**Methodology:** A qualitative research design was chosen for this phenomenological study. A phenomenological study was used to study the lived experiences of TK-6 African American Principals. This technique involves the use of interviews, “directed toward understanding their perspectives on their everyday lived experience with the phenomenon” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 356).

**Findings:** The findings made it difficult to segregate the individual components of the research questions and instead led to one overall conclusion and recommendation. Based on the findings that, from the perspective of African American principals, it is a combination of concrete organizational strategies and interpersonal strategies that combine to make an effective overall strategy when working with African American students, further research into programs that combine both elements is needed.

**Conclusions:** The findings of the study indicate that recommended strategies fall into two categories: Concrete organizational strategies such as goal setting, identifying

problems and analyzing problems; and interpersonal strategies such as identifying emotions, perspective taking, and relationship building. From these findings it can be concluded that from the perspective of African American principals, it is a combination of concrete organizational strategies and interpersonal strategies that combine to make an effective overall strategy when working with African American students.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that a study that identifies and describes the best approaches for implementing combined inter-personal and organizational training for students be conducted.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The achievement gap in the United States “has barely narrowed over the last 50 years” (Camera, 2016, p. 1). Despite the work of school systems and a focus on closing the gap, the progress remains slow (Camera, 2016). The achievement gap refers to the “disparity in academic performance between African American and Hispanic students and their white peers” (Ansell, 2004, p. 1). African American students, families, and communities experience a lack of success due to the achievement gap (J. H. Williams, 2014).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is a national series of tests in a variety of content areas, “show strong relationships between performance and ethnicity” (Hertert & Teague, 2003, p. 3). NAEP results indicate that African American and Hispanic students scoring at or above “proficient” is one-fifth that of Caucasian students (Hertert & Teague, 2003). Those results are consistent “across all subjects and grade levels” (Hertert & Teague, 2003, p. 3). Test results in California also show an achievement gap. The percentage of poor students scoring at or above proficient is one-third of more affluent students in English language arts and one-half that of more affluent students in mathematics across all grade levels (Hertert & Teague, 2003). “Proficient represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter” (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003, p. 28).



The achievement gap also exists in other measures of achievement. “The percent of Asian and Caucasian students completing courses required for admission to the University of California and/or California State University was twice as high for African American and Hispanic students” (Herbert & Teague, 2003, p. 4). Herbert and Teague (2003) state that “The number of African American students who drop out of high school is about twice as high as for Asian and white students” (p. 5).

Abigail Thernstrom (2002) reports that, although half of black families are middle class, racial inequities remain. She attributes the inequities to “the underachievement of black students in school” (Thernstrom, 2002, p. 259). Thernstrom notes that although most reports compare Hispanic and African American scores to Asian and Caucasian student scores their stories are not the same. She notes that Hispanics are typically immigrants and their “academic profile” will likely change; however, African American students are the real concern as their achievement has lagged for many decades.

African American students have the worst standardized tests scores of any other group (Thernstrom, 2002). Although many strategies have been used to close the achievement gap, some experts estimate that it will take “two and a half centuries to close the math gap and one and a half centuries to close the reading gap” (Camera, 2016, p. 2). Principals play a crucial role in closing the achievement gap. To close the achievement gap, principals and school teams must have the ability to meet the diverse needs of their students. Research suggests that for students to be successful and increase student achievement, it is necessary for them to enter kindergarten with “strong social and emotional skills” (George, 2018, p. 29). When students enter school without these skills

it is necessary to provide instruction and opportunities to practice learned skills (George, 2018).

There is a small body of literature regarding African American educational leadership (L. H. Brown & Beckett, 2007). The literature stems from research regarding the success of black teachers with black students; and suggests that black principals “understand the predominantly disadvantaged African American students and families they serve and communicate well with them” (L. H. Brown & Beckett, 2007, p. 7).

### **Background**

Barton (2005) reports that “Student achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups are large and persistent” (p. 12). Barton also notes that schools have tried a variety of strategies to close the achievement gap. This section includes some of the major historical perspectives of the achievement gap, strategies school districts have used to reduce the achievement gaps, principal's perspective of the achievement gap, and social emotional learning. The theoretical foundations and framework that supports the study are presented, and gaps in the literature are identified.

### **Historical Perspective**

#### **The Coleman Report**

The first research surrounding the achievement gap is credited to James Coleman a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His report the “Equality of Education Opportunity,” was mandated in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Camera, 2016). At that time, the Coleman Report determined that in reading and math 87% of average Caucasian students in Grade 12 scored ahead of average African American students.

The report concluded that “family backgrounds” mattered most in determining children's academic success (Viadero, 2006). The amount and distribution of school resources were debated as some people interpreted the report to mean that schools are not to blame. Prior to the Coleman Report, the use of testing data had not been used to measure educational gaps. The report forced people to pay attention to student outcomes, which changed the perspective to focus on student performance in a way that continues today.

### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)**

As late as 1947 almost a third of African Americans 65 and older were illiterate and unable to read or write their own names. During the Civil Rights Movement, the United States began to look at “improved quality of education and access to it” (Young, 2018, p. 78). Young (2018) describes it as a “bloody political battle with some politically powerful people working against the advancement of quality education for ‘all’ children” (p. 78). The resources of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) were all focused on addressing “disadvantaged” students (Young, 2018). Title I of the ESEA remains the largest federal program in K-6 education.

### **No Child Left Behind Act (2001)**

President George W. Bush, believed that many Americans were “limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice and the circumstances of their birth” (as cited in McCloskey, 2010, para. 2). George W. Bush was determined to provide all students an opportunity to excel and reauthorized ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) a few days after becoming president (Sweeney, 2009). The purpose of NCLB was to continue the work of closing the achievement gap and ensure students did not fall behind.

The focus of NCLB was on reading. Under NCLB under Title I mandated requirements for testing and teacher credentialing in all public schools even those that did not receive Title I funding (Sweeney, 2009). Many people believed NCLB was unfair to the schools with the highest populations of poor and minority students as they faced numerous sanctions and cycles of identifications as underperforming (Sweeney, 2009).

### **Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act**

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act was authorized in 2007. This program consisted of an eight-week summer program that served students from ages three to five. The focus for this program was on education, health, and parental involvement. The act promoted school readiness of children from birth to school age. The goal was to provide early childhood education and improve the social, emotional, and cognitive development of low income and minority children (Schumacher, Greenberg, & Mezey, 2003).

### **Every Student Succeeds Act 2015**

ESSA was signed into law by President Obama and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act. This act was written to ensure students are being prepared to be successful. As all the other legislation before it the focus was to “advance equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-needs students” (Representatives, p. 7). Another tenant of ESSA was to continue administering state wide assessments to measure progress.

### **Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap**

“Past and present economic and social conditions are at the root of the achievement gap” (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018, para. 3). There have been many

approaches aimed at reducing the achievement gap that have been implemented over the past two decades. Although many approaches have been tried, Bowman, Comer, and Johns (2018) notes that many have not been successful, stating that, “social science research has focused primarily on group deficits rather than factors that have stymied progress, it has provided few clues on how to construct support systems, even when there is a genuine wish to do so” (para. 3).

### **Evidence-Based Instruction**

The use of evidence-based instruction has been identified as a method to support struggling students. Educators use supplemental, evidenced-based intervention programs which support student learning (Fisher, 2015). With this method teachers transition from using formative assessments to a continuous improvement cycle of instruction, which measures the effectiveness of instruction and is supported by ongoing student performance data (Fisher, 2015).

### **Rigorous Curriculum**

One of the most significant factors to consider in closing the achievement gap is the rigor of the curriculum. Kober (2001) indicated that the rigor “not only affects students' current achievement, but also is the single most important predictor of college success” (p. 27). One concern is that “access of Black and Hispanic students may be hampered because they were tracked into a less academically challenging curriculum” (Kober, 2001, p. 27). There is also the need to ensure that well qualified teachers are available to teach advanced courses (Kober, 2001).

## **Increased Instructional Time**

Instructional time is defined as “time that is actually spent on instructional activities” (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002, p. 1). Gettinger and Seibert (2002) found that “as little as half of each school day may be devoted to instruction” (p. 1). This reduced instructional time is due to a variety of reasons such as (a) interruptions, (b) visitors, (c) announcements and transitions, (d) lack of student engagement and procedural tasks. This is important because academic success and productivity is linked to the amount of instructional time students receive.

## **Supplemental Instruction**

Rothstein (2005) noted that, “the growth in the gap occurs mostly in the after-school hours and during the summertime, when children are not actually in classrooms” (p. 20). After-school and summer instructional experiences provide valuable supplemental instructional knowledge and understanding for students beyond their classroom experience. For example, experiences “that are similar to those middle-class children take for granted would likely play an essential part in narrowing the achievement gap” (Rothstein, 2005, p. 20). In addition, remedial instruction would be a part of such programs. After school programs support student awareness of “the world outside their home and immediate communities, and from the organized athletics, dance, drama, museum visits, recreational reading, and other activities that develop their self-confidence, inquisitiveness, creativity, self-discipline, and organizational skills” (Rothstein, 2005, p. 20). Effective schools research indicates that when there is frequent monitoring of students' progress towards academic achievement the result is improved student behavior and performance (Hertert & Teague, 2003). This supports the teacher's

need to know which students are doing well and “where they need to focus their attention” (Fisher, 2015, Monitor Progress, Ideally Monthly section).

### **Motivating and Engaging Students**

Researchers have identified that there is “a connection between student engagement with the curriculum and achievement” (Hirn, Hollo, & Scott, 2017, p. 38). Positive feedback is also associated with “increased academic engagement” (Hirn et al., 2017, p. 38). Researchers also note that, “teachers in high-achieving schools provided opportunities for student engagement during instruction, whereas teachers in low-achieving schools spent time attending to misbehavior” (Hirn et al., 2017, p. 43). If students are “asked to perform skills they do not have, their motivation and engagement decrease” (Fisher, 2015, Motivate & Engage section). There is also a need to deepen professional development for educators. Researchers note that, “we know that professional development is essential for changing practice and that school reforms tend to be more successful if they are comprehensive instead of piecemeal” (Kober, 2001, p. 33).

### **Links Between School and Home**

Cooperation between schools, parents, and the community, “has a strong, direct impact on student achievement” (Fisher, 2015, Link School and Home section). Although researchers cite the importance of parental involvement, “the definition of what it is remains mixed” (A. Howard & Korver, 2008, p. 83). Unfortunately, for many parents of color their experiences with schools has been “less than favorable” (A. Howard & Korver, 2008, p. 83).

Research by Ogbu indicates that even African American students from middle class families “underachieve when compared with their White peers” (as cited in A. Howard & Korver, 2008, p. 84). Parent involvement is different in African American homes than other ethnic homes. One African American parent who was asked to define parent involvement noted,

Parent involvement is about going to back-to-school nights, open house. It means being involved in PTA (Parent Teacher Association) or School Site Council. That is where the decisions are made and we (African American parents) are usually not involved in those areas. (A. Howard & Korver, 2008, p. 88)

There is clearly a disconnect for African American parents when it comes to defining parent involvement.

“Disparities in educational outcomes and inequitable treatment have strained the relationship between African-American families and school” (Louque & Latunde, 2014, p. 5). African-American parents participate in home-school collaboration, and engage in activities that they believe will help their children achieve academic success in schools (Louque & Latunde, 2014). Researchers suggest that the failure of schools to create comprehensive involvement initiatives for African-American parents is partly due to a lack of understanding of the ways in which African-American families engage with their children’s education as (Louque & Latunde, 2014). Despite much research on parent involvement, little is known about the specific engagement strategies of African-American families. According to Louque and Latunde (2014) African American parents are involved in many ways including: (a) advocate, (b) engage in family literacy



exercises, (c) expand on concepts taught at school, and (d) join school decision-making groups.

### **Principal's Perspective of the Achievement Gap**

When principals understand the strategies and practices that lead to an increase in student achievement they are able to make changes on their campuses and affect student academic achievement (Royle & Brown, 2014). Some research has shown that, “Leadership is the central ingredient in school success defined in terms of value added to student achievement” (Royle & Brown, 2014). In a study completed by Royle and Brown (2014), principals identified several practices related to decreasing the achievement gap. Those practices include: (a) positive and genuine relationships between teachers, students, and parents; (b) instructional strategies designed with the student's in mind; and (c) professional development. Along with these themes was the “sense of responsibility felt by the principal regarding instruction” (Royle & Brown, 2014, p. 89).

### **African American Principal Perspectives**

African American principals “seem to place a higher priority on community involvement” (Echols, 2006, p. 7). In a study of African American principals, three qualities were identified: (a) commitment to the education of African American children, (b) a compassion for an understanding of the communities in which they worked, and (c) a confidence in the ability of all African American children to learn (Lomotey, 1990). One principal was highlighted for his approach to discipline. No matter what the discipline issue involved, “He always seem to express the primacy and probability of the child's academic success” (Lomotey, 1990, p. 186). Lomotey (1990) also noted that he

believed some teachers did not have confidence in the potential of some of their students (Lomotey, 1990). There is research that suggests “Multicultural education and commitment is a strength of African American principals” (Brooks, 2017, p. 18).

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) describes “aspects of education that have been referred to as character education, service learning, citizenship education, and emotional intelligence can all be expressed in the single term social emotional learning” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 1). SEL when combined with academic learning provides children with the balance needed to be successful (M. J. Elias, 2003). SEL are what children need to “work with others, learn effectively and serve essential roles in their families, communities and places of work” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 3).

Many students of poverty don't attend preschool where they would have learned social and emotional skills (George, 2018). Lack of preschool prevents students from having a smooth transition to kindergarten. This can be mitigated when kindergarten teachers take the time to explicitly teach social and emotional skills (George, 2018). “In study after study SEL programs have an immediate effect on outcomes, such as academic achievement, social behavior, and positive self-image” (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p. 22). Unfortunately, many of the SEL programs available do not successfully address life situations experienced by African American children ages 6-18 years of age (Graves Jr et al., 2017). “Culturally adapting SEL programs” (Graves Jr et al., 2017, p. 64) could lead to more success in implementing SEL programs for African American students.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

Several theories provide background and context for understanding the dimensions of achievement gap related to African American students. These theories provide research perspectives on understanding student learning and achievement. They also serve to connect academic learning to student's race, behaviors and mindsets.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT), according to Anthony Muhammad (2015), is based on multiple themes. It emerged during the 1970s when scholars were looking at the problems associated with race and equality in the United States (Muhammad, 2015). Muhammad discussed both racism and social construction thesis. CRT endeavors to explain the achievement gap between African American students and their White peers (Zorn, 2018). CRT depicts children of color as “perpetual victims” (Zorn, 2018, p. 204).

CRT is based on a premise that racism is a part of American society and is based on power structures. It identifies the power structures as white privilege and white supremacy that marginalizes people of color. It defines the achievement gap as structural racism which “consigns nonwhites to failure” (Zorn, 2018, p. 204 ). Other questions might be how can the learner be better supported or how can the instruction be improved (T. Elias, 2011)

The Analytic theory is based on the theory that learning is an interactive process (T. Elias, 2011). Learners will interact with teachers, other students, with content or tutors. Every interaction involves a series of questions to analyze the effectiveness of learning.

## **Growth Mindset Theory**

Growth mindset theory is “powerful when implemented correctly: It can lift grades and motivation, particularly among struggling students, and they can reduce racial, gender, and social class achievement gaps” (Rattan, Savani, Chugh, & Dweck, 2015, Abstract section). Some students believe they cannot change the outcome of how well they do in school. Growth mindsets, “foster greater learning and achievement in students from elementary school through college, especially during challenging transitions or in difficult courses” (Rattan et al., 2015, p. 722). Students with growth mindsets, “seek to learn and develop their abilities, and thus pursue challenges, value effort, and are resilient to setbacks” (Rattan et al., 2015, p. 722).

## **Constructivism**

Constructivism is a learning theory which explains how people might acquire language and learn (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The theory suggests that teachers need to “reflect on their practice in order to apply these ideas to their work and that constructivist teachers encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding” (Bada & Olusegun, 2015, p. 66). Constructivism is also based on the premise that “cognition/learning is the result of mental construction” (Bada & Olusegun, 2015, p. 66).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model provides the theoretical framework for this study. It is widely used in schools to support social emotional learning. CASEL consists of five competencies: (a) self-

management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This model impacts both long-term and short-term outcomes related to, “positive attitudes and social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, academic success, graduation rates, mental health, criminal behavior, substance abuse, and engaged citizenship” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1173).

Self-awareness, as defined by CASEL, is “the ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172). This also includes, “accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and having a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Self-management, as defined by CASEL, is “the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.” This also includes, “managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Social-awareness, as defined by CASEL, is “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Relationship skills, as defined by CASEL, is “the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Responsible decision-making, as defined by CASEL, is “the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

### **Gap in the Research**

The achievement gap has been in existence for decades despite being the subject of an abundance of research and efforts to reduce the disparities. The gap continues to widen every year, despite research and strategies aimed at closing the gap. While the academic achievement gap for African American students has received much attention in recent years, little research has been conducted into the unique perspectives of African American principals who have had success in addressing the achievement gap. As explained by P. L. Thomas (2011), “the achievement gap is primarily a reflection of the equity gap that exists in the lives of children, and only secondarily a reflection of school quality and practices” (p. 1). To address inequities experienced by students, it is necessary to address the achievement gap. Historically researchers have traditionally responded to the achievement gap with a focus on a narrow view of student outcomes such as test scores. P. L. Thomas argues that educators must address the whole child to close the achievement gap.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The Black-White achievement gap is the greatest civil rights issue of our time (Paige & Witty, 2009). It is said to be, “One of the most critical and perplexing educational issues of the last forty plus years” (Ferguson, Stellar, Schools, & Morganton,

2010, p. 56). There seems to be, “a collective lack of urgency about the growing achievement gap between African American and white schoolchildren” (Paige & Witty, 2009, Foreword section). One conclusion presented regarding closing the achievement gap is that, “African American leadership must embrace and champion the cause” (Paige & Witty, 2009, Foreword section).

Royle and Brown (2014) note that there is much research about the achievement gap, however, “Limited qualitative research has explored the perceptions of principals in narrowing the achievement gap” (p. 86). Burriss stated that “principals are often the first to be held accountable for a school that fails to meet state and/or federal accountability standards and find themselves at the center of the accountability movement” (as cited in Royal & Brown, 2014, p. 87) then it would seem efforts to close the achievement gap would be focused on the principal (Royle & Brown, 2014). Principals have “a tremendous effect on the quality of the school” (Royle & Brown, 2014, p. 88).

Little research exists about African American principal's perspectives regarding closing the achievement gap. Paige and Witty (2009) notes that African American leaders must lead, “passionately, righteously and with an unwavering sense of moral purpose” (p. x) that guided such greats as Frederick Douglass, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Paige and Whitty also note, “the goal should be to educate our kids by any means necessary” (p. x). African American principals can “lead the fight to make certain that our children learn and excel in school” (Paige & Witty, 2009, p. xi) in a way other leaders can't. Although African American principals represented 10% of all principals in the United States (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016) there are few studies on their unique perspectives on improving the academic performance of African American

ideas and thought regarding closing the gap for African American students. Closing the achievement gap is important, regardless of race or socio-economic status. As African American individuals who have, by the position they hold, demonstrated that they have overcome any achievement gap in their own educational experience these principals are a great source of thought and ideas regarding how to close the gap for African American students. However, there is little known about the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals to close the achievement gap. This study is designed to address that gap.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals (Grades TK-6) in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. An additional purpose of the study was to understand the strategies within CASEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by African American elementary school principals in these counties.

### **Central Research Questions**

This phenomenological study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do African American elementary school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California identify and



describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making?

2. What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

Six research questions were developed to help answer the main research questions.

1. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?
2. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?
3. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?

4. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?
5. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?
6. Which of the best practices implemented within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by African American elementary school principals?

### **Significance of the Problem**

The role of educators is to ensure all students, receive a quality education and have the opportunity to experience academic success. Despite this noble endeavor, the achievement gap continues to exist. The achievement gap refers to “the disparity in academic performance between groups of students” (Ansell, 2004, p. 1). Most often, this refers to the difference between African American students and Caucasian students. One could say, the achievement gap has existed since slavery. However, measuring from the “*Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954” (Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 3), it has been in existence for at least 66 years.

There is no question that race and culture matter in schools, which impacts the achievement gap (T. C. Howard, 2010). To eliminate the achievement gap, it is necessary to identify “the specific aspects of culture that seem to be most influential” (Noguera, 2008). Each culture has “its unique history and coping strategies for oppression” (Bowman et al., 2018, para. 4). Black principals place a “higher priority” on involving the community, which they view as fundamental to the success of themselves and the school (Echols, 2006). Echols (2006) suggests that this sense of community is a “key ingredient in bringing about improved academic performance for black students” (p. 7).

There has been much research regarding the need to increase the number of teachers of color. One argument is that “teachers of color provide critical role models for all children, especially students of color” (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012, p. 285). The second argument Villegas, Strom, and Lucas (2012) presents is that “teachers of color are particularly suited to teaching students of color because they bring to their work an inherent understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of these learners” (Villegas et al., 2012, p. 285). This study will help to fill in the gap in the research regarding the perceptions of African American principals about the closing of the achievement gap. The results of this study may assist districts in hiring practices that could have a direct impact on closing the achievement gap for African American students. This study may also provide much information and data to inform administrator credentialing programs regarding strategies implemented by African American principals that have the most significant impact on closing the achievement gap.

Professional organizations such as the California Association of African American Superintendent's and Administrators (CAAASA), an organization committed to identifying and addressing the critical issues in education through public policy relative to the status and performance of African-American students in California, may find the results of this study of interest and in support of their work. Another organization that may find the results of this research supportive is the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). Also, policymakers across the nation and in California may find this study useful in setting policies that result in closing the decades-long achievement gap that exists for students of color.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are used frequently throughout this study. The definitions are to provide clarity and context for this dissertation study.

*Achievement gap.* The achievement gap refers to the “disparity in academic performance between African American and Hispanic students and their white peers” (Ansell, 2004, p. 1).

*Elementary School Principal.* The principal of a school that includes grades K-6. The school configuration may include transitional kindergarten (TK)-5, TK-6 or any combination of the grades TK through 6 (CDE 2020).

*Proficient.* Proficient represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including (a) subject-matter knowledge, (b) application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and (c) analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter (Donahue et al., 2003).

*Relationship skills.* Relationship skills is the “ability to effectively communicate, work well with peers, and build meaningful relationships (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

*Responsible Decision Making.* Responsible decision-making is the “ability to make plans for the future, follow moral/ethical standards, and contribute to the well-being of others” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172 ).

*Self-awareness.* Self-awareness is “the ability to recognize one’s emotions and accurately assess one’s strengths and weaknesses” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

*Self-management.* Self-management is “the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

*Social Awareness.* Social awareness is “awareness of the culture, beliefs, and feelings of the people and world around them” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

*Social emotional learning.* Social emotional learning describes “aspects of education that have been referred to as character education, service learning, citizenship education, and emotional intelligence can all be expressed in the single term social emotional learning” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 1).

### **Delimitations**

The focus of this study is delimited to current or former African American principals with a minimum of two years in the principalship. The study is further delimited to the county of in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, California. This study focuses on the academic achievement of African American students in grades TK-6.

## **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters and concludes with references and appendices. Chapter I presents an overview and the significance of this study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature, including theoretical framework, instructional strategies, and gaps in research. The literature review is followed by Chapter III, which presents the study methodology and research design in addition to an explanation of data gathering procedures and a description of the study population and sample. Chapter IV offers an analysis of the data derived from this study. A description of the common themes that surfaced and interpretations of the finding are presented. Chapter V consists of the conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future studies. The study concludes with references and appendices.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) writes that, “The achievement gap is the most talked about issue in US Education” (p. 3). She defines the achievement gap as, “The disparities in standardized test scores between black and white students” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Ladson-Billings writes that although researchers study the students experiencing the achievement gap, “The researchers rarely provide the kind of remedies to help them solve their problems” (p. 3).

The achievement gap in the United States “has barely narrowed over the last 50 years” (Camera, 2016, p. 1). Despite the work of school systems and a focus on closing the gap, the progress remains slow (Camera, 2016). Singham (2003) writes that the achievement of Black students and that of White students is one of the most infuriating problems afflicting education; because there is nothing genetic that can be the cause of the gap. According to Singham we should be able to solve the achievement gap. Singham writes that the achievement gap is caused by widespread educational problems and cannot be thought of as a Black problem with White achievement thought of as the norm.

African American students have the worst standardized tests scores of any other group (Thernstrom, 2002). Although many strategies have been used to close the achievement gap, some experts estimate that it will take “two and a half centuries to close the math gap and one and a half centuries to close the reading gap” (Camera, 2016, p. 2). Principals play a crucial role in closing the achievement gap. To close the achievement gap, principals and school teams must have the ability to meet the diverse needs of their students. Research suggests that for students to be successful and increase student

achievement, it is necessary for them to enter kindergarten with “strong social and emotional skills” (George, 2018, p. 29). When students enter school without these skills it is necessary to provide instruction and opportunities to practice learned skills (George, 2018).

Some researchers argue that we should focus on opportunity gaps in educational practices when attempting to make sense of, and describe the achievement gap (Milner, 2013). Focusing on the achievement gap may force us to focus on the perceived shortcomings of students rather than the assets that students and their families possess (Milner, 2013). A focus on the achievement can also focus on individual students as well as groups of students rather than inequitable, racist, and sexist structures, systems, contexts, policies, and practices that lead to perceived achievement gaps (Milner, 2013).

Barton (2003) writes that, “To narrow and eventually eliminate achievement gaps, we first must understand the gaps. We know that skin color has no bearing on the ability to achieve” (p. 5). The title of this article is “Parsing the Achievement Gap.” Parsing is defined as examining or analyzing minutely. Barton suggests a greater more comprehensive effort, with a resulting set of statistical indicators, for “parsing” the achievement gap is necessary (Barton, 2003). Barton identified 14 correlates of education including:

- Rigor of curriculum
- Teacher preparation
- Teacher experience
- Attendance
- Class size



- Availability of appropriate technology assisted instruction
- School safety
- Parent participation
- Birth weight
- Hunger and nutrition
- Reading to young children
- Amount of TV watching
- Parent availability
- Parent participation

Barton researched all of the correlates and suggests that a one-time effort such is not enough to close the gap. Barton says what is needed is a set of indicators, that can be watched at regular intervals.

### **Historical Perspective of Minority Students' Achievement Gap**

#### **The Coleman Report**

The first research surrounding the achievement gap is credited to James Coleman a sociologist at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. The Coleman Report written in 1966 suggested that “schools play little role in generating achievement gaps” (Downey & Condrón, 2016, p. 207). The Coleman Report concluded that, “Variation in academic performance was strongly linked to children’s family environments but hardly at all to per pupil expenditures or other measurable school characteristics” (Downey & Condrón, 2016, p. 207).

According to Rivkin (2017), “The Coleman Report, sought answers to two burning questions: (1) How extensive is racial segregation within U.S. schools? (2) How

adversely does segregation affect educational opportunities for black students?” (p. 26). Coleman also noted that a student’s peer group was more important than any other school-related factor (as cited in Rivkin, 2017). This finding was used by the Johnson and Nixon administrations to support desegregation efforts in southern states (Rivkin, 2017).

The Coleman Report was commissioned by the Department of Education and involved more than 650,000 students and 4,000 schools. The major finding of the study was,

That schools bring little influence to bear on a child’s achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (Downey & Condrón, 2016, p. 208)

The report was misinterpreted to suggest that, “Schools do not matter” (Downey & Condrón, 2016, p. 208).

The Coleman Report the “Equality of Education Opportunity,” was mandated in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Camera, 2016). At that time, the Coleman Report determined that in reading and math, 87% of average White students in Grade 12 scored ahead of average Black students. The report concluded that family backgrounds mattered most in determining children's academic success (Viadero, 2006). Prior to the Coleman Report, the use of testing data had not been used to measure educational gaps.

The report forced people to pay attention to student outcomes, which changed the perspective to focus on student performance in a way that continues today.

### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)**

The ESEA of 1965, was enacted under President Lyndon B. Johnson to offer equitable educational opportunities to the nation's disadvantaged (J. Y. Thomas & Brady, 2005). ESEA provided financial resources to schools to enhance the learning experiences of underprivileged children. ESEA has consistently remained the single largest fiscal source of federal support for educationally vulnerable schoolchildren (J. Y. Thomas & Brady, 2005).

As late as 1947 almost a third of African Americans 65 and older were illiterate and unable to read or write their own names. During the Civil Rights Movement, the United States began to look at "improved quality of education and access to it" (Young, 2018, p. 78). Young (2018) describes it as a "bloody political battle with some politically powerful people working against the advancement of quality education for 'all' children" (p. 78). The resources of ESEA were all focused on addressing disadvantaged students (Young, 2018). Title I of the ESEA remains the largest federal program in TK-12 education.

In 1965, ESEA provided approximately \$1 billion in funds directly to school districts and schools. Although distribution of ESEA federal funds was based largely on child poverty data, ESEA-related services were made available to children on the basis of educational need (J. Y. Thomas & Brady, 2005). One of the most vocal opponents of ESEA was the National Education Association, due to the disbursement of federal dollars to private schools (J. Y. Thomas & Brady, 2005).

## **No Child Left Behind Act (2001)**

The Federal NCLB Act of 2002, which reauthorized the ESEA of 1965, was intended to raise the achievement level of elementary and secondary schools and ensure that all children have equal access to a quality education (Odland, 2006). The NCLB Act, signed into law by

President George W. Bush, was founded on four fundamental principles: 1) increased accountability for school districts and schools in terms of meeting state academic standards in math and reading; 2) school choice for parents and students who wish to transfer out of a ‘failing’ school not meeting the standards; 3) greater flexibility for states, school districts, and schools in deciding how best to use federal education funds awarded for achievement; and 4) federal funds to promote quality reading programs for K-3 students. (Odland, 2006, p. 98)

Historically, most studies and reports on the achievement gap have focused on differences in achievement scores between Caucasian and African American students on national tests, such as the SAT or the NAEP (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007). NCLB shifted the focus down to the school level and focused on how well racial and ethnic subgroups in a given school are performing relative to their white peers (Anderson et al., 2007).

President George H. W. Bush came into office saying that he was going to be the “Education President” (McCloskey, 2010). President Bush, believed that many Americans were “limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice and the circumstances of their birth” (as cited in McCloskey, 2010, para. 2). President Bush was determined to provide all students and opportunity to excel and reauthorized ESEA as the NCLB Act a

few days after becoming president (Sweeney, 2009). The purpose of NCLB was to continue the work of closing the achievement gap and ensure students did not fall behind. The focus of NCLB was on reading. Under NCLB, Title I mandated requirements for testing and teacher credentialing in all public schools even those that did not receive Title I funding (Sweeney, 2009). Many people believed NCLB was unfair to the schools with the highest populations of poor and minority students as they faced numerous sanctions and cycles of identifications as underperforming (Sweeney, 2009).

Personal choice, one of President Bush's republican pillars, was evident throughout the document. When schools were deemed "in need of improvement," students within the school had a choice to change schools. Accountability and results, another conservative principle, was a key component of the Act, with standardized test scores examining adequate yearly progress in exchange for federal dollars or sanctions (McCloskey, 2010).

With the passage of NCLB the Bush administration set out to close the achievement gap in the American school system and create outstanding academic institutions for all students (McCloskey, 2010). The NCLB enactment became the legacy of George W. Bush.

### **Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (2007)**

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act was authorized in 2007. This program consisted of an eight-week summer program that served students from ages three to five. The focus for this program was on education, health, and parental involvement. The act promoted school readiness of children from birth to school age. The goal was to provide early childhood education and improve the social, emotional,

and cognitive development of low income and minority children (Schumacher et al., 2003).

The new Head Start Act increased the requirements for credentialing for classroom teachers, teaching assistants, and education coordinators (Tipton, 2008). The requirements were increased incrementally over time and ensure that

Center-based classroom teachers must have an associate's degree, teaching assistants must have a minimum of a child development associate (CDA) credential or be enrolled in a CDA program; and that a minimum of 50% of teachers nationwide must have a bachelor's degree. (Tipton, 2008, p. 5)

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 contained numerous changes for improvement including governance, eligibility, and enrollment (Tipton, 2008).

The Readiness Act mandated improvements in specific literacy and language skills (Powell, Diamond, Burchinal, & Koehler, 2010). Many initiatives such as Early Reading First targeted improvements in teacher quality as a pathway to boosting the literacy outcomes of at-risk children. Other initiatives introduced to support teachers included professional development, coaching and mentoring (Powell et al., 2010).

One new criterion resulted in grants being awarded for a definite time period of five years to grantees delivering high-quality services only (Bullough, Hall-Kenyon, & MacKay, 2012). Following the passage of the Readiness Act, Head Start faced growing accountability pressures and a press toward standardization (Bullough et al., 2012).

According to Bullough, Hall-Kenyon, and MacKay (2012), "Increasing the level of Head Start teacher educational qualifications is a central strategy, part of professionalizing

Head Start” (p. 329). Head Start was developed out of concern for the well-being of poor children and their families and many of the teachers and aides were former Head Start parents who started as volunteers and later became staff.

Following the Readiness Act new criteria, teachers, “are now much younger and more highly educated than their predecessors” (Bullough et al., 2012, p. 329). However, these younger teachers often do not stay very long which results in a change in the recruitment patterns. Many of these teachers leave the less financially appealing Head Start for jobs with elementary schools resulting in a pattern of young and inexperienced teachers. The downside of the Readiness Act is staff instability and teacher quality (Bullough et al., 2012).

### **Every Student Succeeds Act 2015**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized into the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 (Plans, 2015). ESSA provided states with more flexibility which was very different from the strict accountability of NCLB (Plans, 2015). The highlights of ESSA include (a) accountability plans, (b) accountability Goals, and (c) accountability systems.

ESSA was signed into law by President Obama and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act. This act was written to ensure students are being prepared to be successful. As all the other legislation before it the focus was to “advance equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-needs students” (United States House of Representatives, 2016, p. 7). Another tenant of ESSA was to continue administering state wide assessments to measure progress. Under ESSA accountability

for English learners moved from Title III to Title I where everyone else's accountability was (Plans, 2015). The purpose was to make accountability a priority for students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents an opportunity for the federal government, states, districts, and schools to equitably design education systems to ensure that the students who have historically been underserved by these same education systems receive an education that prepares them for the demands of the 21st century. (Cook-Harvey, Darling-Hammond, Lam, Mercer, & Roc, 2016, p. v)

ESSA provisions can be used to advance equity and excellence for students of color, low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and those who are homeless or in foster care. The four provisions are: (a) access to learning opportunities focused on higher-order thinking skills; (b) multiple measures of equity; (c) resource equity; and (d) evidence-based interventions. These provisions can be utilized by educators, researchers, policy influencers, and advocates to advance equity in education for all students (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

Higher-order thinking skills means that schools must go beyond rote memorization skills to skills that reflect 21st century learning. ESSA also requires multiple measures of equity that go beyond graduation rate and test scores. An example of multiple measures is an indicator that reflects parent/community engagement. ESSA shines a light on resource inequities by requiring states to report per pupil spending and encourages districts to fund schools based on needs to support underserved populations (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). The final provision evidenced based interventions requires schools to use proven strategies that have research to support their implementation.



Funding for early childhood programs and community-based schools is also included under ESSA.

The spotlight on test scores provided by NCLB did not lead to skills needed to solve real world problems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). ESSA marked an important change to a more holistic approach. This created more opportunity for states to be innovative and address long lasting inequalities in student learning opportunities and outcomes. The goal of ESSA is achieving an equitable school system that leads to meaningful, relevant, and engaging learning opportunities for all children (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

### **Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap**

“Past and present economic and social conditions are at the root of the achievement gap” (Bowman et al., 2018, para. 3). There have been many approaches aimed at reducing the achievement gap that have been implemented over the past two decades. Although many approaches have been tried, Bowman et al. (2018) notes that many have not been successful, stating that, “social science research has focused primarily on group deficits rather than factors that have stymied progress, it has provided few clues on how to construct support systems, even when there is a genuine wish to do so” (para. 3).

### **Evidence-Based Instruction**

The use of evidence-based instruction has been identified as a method to support struggling students. Educators use supplemental, evidenced-based intervention programs which support student learning (Fisher, 2015). With this method teachers transition from cycle using formative assessments to a continuous improvement cycle of instruction,

which measures the effectiveness of instruction and is supported by ongoing student performance data (Fisher, 2015).

### **Rigorous Curriculum**

Ainsworth (2011) defines a rigorous curriculum as an inclusive set of intentionally aligned components—clear learning outcomes with matching assessments, engaging and relevant learning experiences, and high-effect-size instructional strategies—organized into sequenced units of study that serve as both the detailed road map and the high-quality delivery system for ensuring that all students achieve the desired end: the attainment of the designated grade- or course specific standards within a particular content area.

One of the most significant factors to consider in closing the achievement gap is the rigor of the curriculum. Kober (2001) indicated that the rigor “not only affects students' current achievement, but also is the single most important predictor of college success” (p. 27). One concern is that “access of Black and Hispanic students may be hampered because they were tracked into a less academically challenging curriculum” (Kober, 2001, p. 27). There is also the need to ensure that well qualified teachers are available to teach advanced courses (Kober, 2001).

All educators need to be able to answer this question at any point during each school year: “How well are my students doing in their efforts to learn the state standards?” (Ainsworth, 2011, p. xvii). A rigorous and relevant curriculum provides educators with an organized framework that enables them to monitor student progress toward mastery of the standards (Ainsworth, 2011). By focusing on intended learning outcomes and assessment evidence of student learning, educators can adjust their

instruction to meet student learning needs. This allows teachers to utilize available instructional resources to help all students learn their grade-level or course-specific standards (Ainsworth, 2011).

### **Increased Instructional Time**

Instructional time is defined as “time that is actually spent on instructional activities” (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Gettinger and Seibert (2002) found that “as little as half of each school day may be devoted to instruction” (p. 1). This reduced instructional time is due to a variety of reasons such as interruptions, visitors, announcements and transitions, lack of student engagement, and procedural tasks. This is important because academic success and productivity is linked to the amount of instructional time students receive.

Researchers have studied the effects of time spent on learning from natural experiments around the country such as days schools are closed due to snow and other weather related events. Evidence suggests that extending time in school would in fact likely raise student achievement (Marcotte & Hansen, 2010). Marcotte and Hanson (2010) write that an increase in instruction of 10 days results in an increase of student performance of .2 standard deviation. Marcotte and Hansen also believe that this emerging body of research suggests that expanding instructional time is as effective as other educational interventions intended to boost learning.

One of the largest impediments to improving academic instruction provided to youth is the fact that adults tend to focus solely on behavioral interventions while ignoring academic deficits (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013). Researchers have found that almost 60% of instructional time is lost due to disruptive behavior (Benner et

al., 2013). In response the disruptive behavior teachers will often remove students from class or simply not ask them to complete academic assignments (Benner et al., 2013)

### **Supplemental Instruction**

Youth with behavior and or emotional disorders tend to be educated in self-contained classrooms which prevents them from having access to core instruction and supplemental instruction needed to close gaps (Benner et al., 2013). Most core curriculum programs used by schools do not incorporate the functions of explicit instruction. In contrast, most evidence-based supplemental interventions designed to be delivered at the Tier 2 and 3 levels include explicit instruction (Benner et al., 2013).

According to Arendale (1994) supplemental instruction increases academic performance and retention. He describes supplemental instruction as regularly scheduled peer facilitated sessions that give students the opportunity to discuss course information. In this model students are not identified as needing support, instead the supplemental instruction is provided to all students and reduces the stigma students feel from being identified as needing support (Arendale, 1994). This type of supplemental organization supports students in mastering course content and promotes student interaction and mutual support (Arendale, 1994).

### **Motivating and Engaging Students**

Many struggling learners have low self-efficacy for academics, and believe that they lack the ability to succeed (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). This results in them tending to avoid academics and giving up quickly when difficulties arise (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Many teachers are at a loss in knowing what to say or do to motivate students. When students don't believe they can learn it can impede academic achievement and

create self-fulfilling prophecies of failure and learned helplessness that can devastate psychological well-being (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

There are general strategies for self-efficacy that teachers can use to motivate students including:

- Providing moderately challenging tasks
- Using peer models
- Teach specific learning strategies
- Capitalize on student choice and interest
- Reinforce effort and correct strategy use
- Encourage students to try
- Stress recent successes
- Give frequent, focused, task-specific read back
- Stress functional attribution statements (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

These strategies do not always work; however, they can improve struggling learners' self-efficacy, which in turn helps improve their motivation to succeed academically and their academic performance (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

### **Links Between Home and School**

Solutions for minimizing the effects of poverty on student achievement focus on raising families out of poverty and providing experiences missing in the lives of poor children (Hertert & Teague, 2003). One way to offset the effects of poverty is to provide poor children with opportunities to develop the cognitive and social skills they will need to succeed in school. Strategies include providing free or inexpensive programs that

support parents in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to create nurturing and stimulating environments for their infants and young children (Hertert & Teague, 2003).

One of the most used models for parental involvement is Epstein's Framework for Six Types of Parental Involvement (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Epstein's framework offers ways for schools to identify parental involvement and specific areas to target for improved involvement. However, Epstein's model has become a checklist for schools and does not have a cultural lens by which the intersections of race, ability, disability, income, and education can be examined (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016).

An assumption is made, that the achievement gap between Black students and others is tied to the topic of parenting, and schools imply that students are victims of parental apathy to the goals of education (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Even when Black parents strive to be a part of the school community schools continue to suspend Black students more frequently and over identify Black students for special education (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) also writes that, "Disparities in educational outcomes and inequitable treatment have strained the relationship between Black families and schools" (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016, p. 73).

## **The Perspective of the Achievement Gap**

### **Principal's Perspective of the Achievement Gap**

When principals understand the strategies and practices that lead to an increase in student achievement they are able to make changes on their campuses and affect student academic achievement (Royle & Brown, 2014). Some research has shown that, "Leadership is the central ingredient in school success defined in terms of value added to

student achievement” (Royle & Brown, 2014, p. 87). In a study completed by Royle and Brown (2014), principals identified several practices related to decreasing the achievement gap. Those practices include, positive and genuine relationships between teachers, students, and parents; instructional strategies designed with the student's in mind; and professional development. Royle and Brown, also identified a “sense of responsibility felt by the principal regarding instruction” (p. 89).

Waxman, Yuan-Hsuan, and Macneil (2008) conducted a study regarding how principals closed the gaps experienced by their students. Principals’ responses were categorized in seven areas:

- Tutoring
- Remedial
- Pullout programs or interventions
- Effective teaching strategies
- Analyzing achievement data
- Teachers’ professional development
- Mentoring
- Parental involvement (Waxman, Yuan-Hsuan, & Macneil, 2008).

The majority of principals reported using tutoring to close the achievement gap (Waxman et al., 2008).

The third highest rated category reported was effective teaching strategies that were student centered. The strategies included: (a) using individualized instruction, (b) differentiated instruction, and (c) small group instruction. One principal said, “The achievement gap issue has built up our knowledge of other cultures and trends as we look

for ways to close these gaps” (Waxman et al., 2008, Results section, para. 4). Waxman (2008) found that very few principals reported using parental involvement to narrow the achievement gaps. Researchers have found that principal leadership, through its effect on teachers, can positively affect student outcome (White-Smith, 2012). White-Smith (2012) writes, “Understanding how principals encourage and deliver instructional excellence is crucial to implementing successful urban school reform” (p. 6).

### **African American Principal Perspectives**

African American principals “seem to place a higher priority on community involvement” (Echols, 2006, p. 7). In a study of African American principals, three qualities were identified: (a) commitment to the education of African American children, (b) a compassion for an understanding of the communities in which they worked, and (c) a confidence in the ability of all African American children to learn (Lomotey, 1990). One principal was highlighted for his approach to discipline. No matter what the discipline issue involved, “He always seem to express the primacy and probability of the child's academic success” (Lomotey, 1990, p. 186). Lomotey also noted that he believed some teachers did not have confidence in the potential of some of their students (Lomotey, 1990). There is research that suggests “Multicultural education and commitment is a strength of African American principals” (Brooks, 2017, p. 18).

According to L. H. Brown and Beckett (2007), “Black principals understand the predominantly disadvantaged African American students and families they serve and communicate well with them” (p. 18). Although it is estimated that minority students are now the majority in public schools, the data shows that more than 80% of teachers are Caucasian (Rich, 2015). There is an atmosphere of mutual defensiveness and distrust



between Caucasian middle-class teachers and disadvantaged African American students and parents in urban school districts (L. H. Brown & Beckett, 2007). The result is a barrier that often prevents successful communication between the school and parents. One way to remove the barrier is to have an African American administrator who can help facilitate the communication between African American students, Caucasian teachers, and school district officials (L. H. Brown & Beckett, 2007). This can result in everyone working together leading to improved student behavior and academic achievement.

Given the increasing number of schools with a majority of African American students, leadership theory, preparation, and practice must be approached from a broader a perspective that includes the scholarship and knowledge of African Americans (F. Brown, 2005). According to F. Brown (2005), in these districts and schools African Americans are most likely to assume leadership positions. Historically, African Americans have been underrepresented in school administration. Prior to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the majority of African American students attended segregated public schools with African American administrators, however, after the *Brown* decision, many African American principals lost their jobs (F. Brown, 2005).

By 1982 only 11% of principals were African American (F. Brown, 2005). F. Brown (2005) suggests that it is important that models of school leadership include perspectives articulated by African American scholars and school leaders to address the specific social, political, and educational contexts that affect the education of African American students.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT was introduced into education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Researchers have used the theory to examine educational policy and practice. It has provided a forum for People of Color to share their lived experiences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT, according to Anthony Muhammad (2015), is based on multiple themes. It emerged during the 1970s when scholars were looking at the problems associated with race and equality in the United States (Muhammad, 2015). Muhammad discussed both racism and social construction thesis. CRT endeavors to explain the achievement gap between African American students and their White peers (Zorn, 2018). CRT depicts children of color as “perpetual victims” (Zorn, 2018, p. 204).

According to Brayboy (2005), CRT evolved in response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (Brayboy, 2005). CLS argues that the law must focus on how it is applied to specific groups in particular circumstances. According to Brayboy, CRT centers race and racism, and focuses on other areas of subordination. CRT values experiential knowledge and as a result, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data by CRT scholars. Listening is seen as an ability to make connections between “traditional” community values and those of larger societal institutions like courts or schools (Brayboy, 2005).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) illustrate in a variety of ways how CRT aligns with educational inequity for African American students. They highlight that racism is not a series of isolated events in American life, and offer the following validation: If racism were merely isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would expect to see at least a

few examples of educational excellence and equity together in the nation's public schools. Instead, places where African Americans experience educational success tend to be outside of the public schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

CRT is based on a premise that racism is a part of American society and is based on power structures. It identifies the power structures as White privilege and White supremacy that marginalizes people of color. It defines the achievement gap as structural racism which "consigns nonwhites to failure" (Zorn, 2018, p. 204).

### **Growth Mindset Theory**

According to growth mindset theory, students who believe their abilities can grow could improve their achievement over time (Miller, 2019). "The concept of growth mindset is based on the idea that affirming effort will lead to a greater focus on working hard and resilience and can thereby produce greater levels of achievement" (Davis, 2019, Description section). Students who have a growth mindset believe that their performance can improve with effort which also supports the development of positive academic challenge, and greater enjoyment of learning (Davis, 2019). One researcher theorized that, when Black students internalize hurtful comments, it may hinder their success in school by unintentionally creating a fixed mindset, which can result in students not reaching their full potential (Davis, 2019).

Students with a fixed mindset tend to avoid situations in which they might fail however, in contrast, students who have a growth mindset tend to see difficult tasks as a way to increase their abilities and seek out challenging learning experiences that enable them to do so (Claro, Paunesku, & Dweck, 2016). In their research Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck (2016) found for the first time on a national scale a robust relationship between

students' mindsets about intelligence and their academic performance as well as a relationship between mindsets and economic disadvantage (Claro et al., 2016).

### **Constructivism**

The “constructivist stance maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, 1.2 What is Constructivism section). Constructivism refers to the how of learning and thinking, and describes the way that students can make sense of the material and also how the materials can be taught effectively (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Piaget asserts that learning does not occur passively; it occurs by active construction of meaning (as cited in Amineh & Asl, 2015). When learners, experience a situation that challenges the way we think, it causes a state of imbalance and we must then alter our thinking to restore equilibrium or balance (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Amineh and Asl (2015) hold that teachers should first consider their students' knowledge and allow them to put that knowledge in to practice.

“Constructivism maintains that the sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice” (Onuf, 1998, p. 20). Onuf (1998) writes that, constructivism maintains that the sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice. Constructivism is a learning theory which explains how people might acquire language and learn (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The theory suggests that teachers need to “reflect on their practice in order to apply these ideas to their work and that constructivist teachers encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding” (Bada & Olusegun, 2015, p. 66). Constructivism is also based on the premise that “cognition/learning is the result of mental construction” (Bada & Olusegun, 2015, p. 66).

## **Social Emotional and School Related Factors That Cause the Achievement Gap**

SEL describes “aspects of education that have been referred to as character education, service learning, citizenship education, and emotional intelligence can all be expressed in the single term social emotional learning” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 1). SEL when combined with academic learning provides children with the balance needed to be successful (M. J. Elias, 2003). Social emotional skills are what children need to “work with others, learn effectively and serve essential roles in their families, communities and places of work” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 3).

SEL is hard to define and understand exactly what it looks like (Is & Matters, 2019). “Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have demonstrated positive effects on children’s social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, as well as classroom climate” (McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor, & McClowry, 2015, p. 1). SEL is:

- Maintaining cooperative relationships
- Making responsible decisions
- Managing strong emotions
- Communicating clearly and assertively
- Solving problems effectively
- Recognizing emotions in oneself and others
- Having empathy for others (Is & Matters, 2019)

SEL can be developed in children by modeling behavior seen in adults or it can be taught explicitly in the classroom (Is & Matters, 2019). SEL is important in a variety of ways including: (a) school performance, (b) economic benefit, (c) life and wellbeing, and (d) career and workforce achievement. In the area of school performance, SEL can predict

academic achievement better than IQ tests (Is & Matters, 2019). Is and Matters (2019) write the return on investment in SEL programming and practices is estimated to be worth roughly \$11 for every \$1 spent. SEL is also associated with lower rates of behaviors, such as drug use and teen pregnancy, and with a decrease in dropout rates of between 5-12% (Is & Matters, 2019). In the workforce area 79% of employers identify social emotional skills as being the most important qualities needed for success (Is & Matters, 2019).

“Achieving the kind of balance that encourages all children to learn, work, and contribute to their fullest potential has been a continuing challenge as the world grows more complex and our communities more fragmented” (M. J. Elias, 2003, p. 6). SEL when added to academic learning equates to educating the whole child (M. J. Elias, 2003). SEL is sometimes called the missing piece, because it links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general.

In addition, SEL is increasingly becoming an area of focus for determining children’s school readiness and predicting their academic success (Denham & Brown, 2010). Denham and Brown (2010) point out that young children with SEL competencies participate more in the classroom, are more accepted by classmates and teachers, and are given more instruction and positive feedback by teachers (Denham & Brown, 2010). Children without SEL competencies, show greater likelihood to dislike school, perform poorly on academic tasks, and to later experience grade retention, drop out, and persist in antisocial behaviors.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**

“Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the nation’s leading organization advancing and promoting integrated Pre-K to 12 academic, social, and emotional learning for all students” (DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017, CASEL section). The mission of CASEL is to make SEL an integral part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL collaborates to ensure all students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and contributing members of society. The CASEL model provides the theoretical framework for this study. It is widely used in schools to support social emotional learning. CASEL consists of five competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This model impacts both long-term and short-term outcomes related to, “positive attitudes and social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, academic success, graduation rates, mental health, criminal behavior, substance abuse, and engaged citizenship” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1173). For this study, the variables used for inquiry were the five CASEL competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

Self-Awareness as defined by CASEL is “the ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172). This also includes, “accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and having a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Self-management as defined by CASEL is “the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.” This also includes, “managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Social-Awareness as defined by CASEL is “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

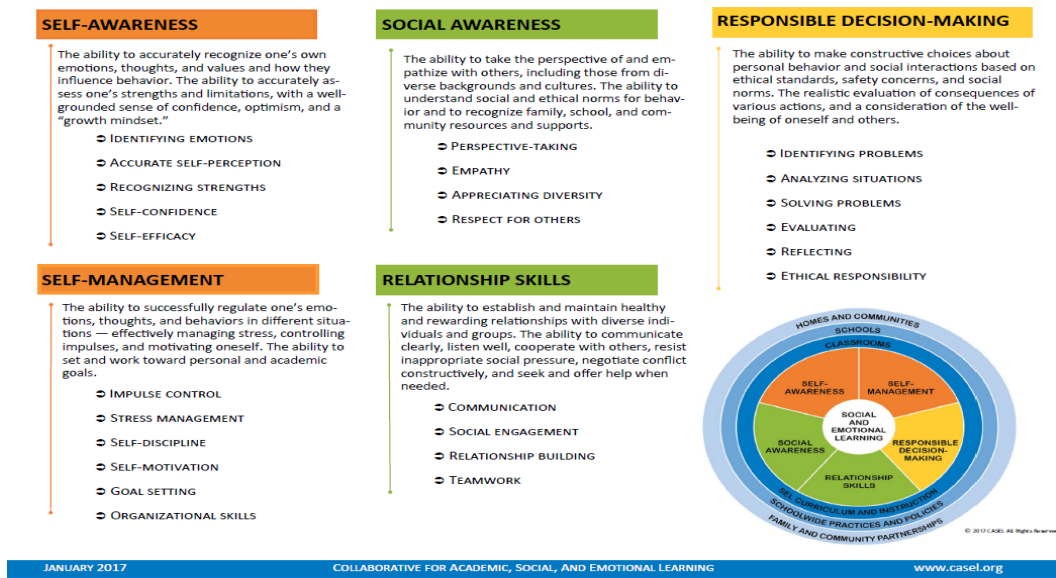
Relationship Skills as defined by CASEL is “the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

Responsible decision-making defined by CASEL is “the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (as cited in Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1172).

“CASEL has developed a set of benchmarks to help guide school-wide SEL implementation” (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 4) (see Figure 1).



## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES



*Figure 1.* Social and emotional learning competencies. Social and emotional learning competencies used by African American TK-12 principals to measure the achievement gap from the collaborative for academic, social and emotional learning. Adapted from “Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies,” by CASEL, n.d. Available from [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)

### Literature Gap

This review of literature reveals an extensive history of research and policies directed at closing the achievement gap with respect to African American students. However, the existing research fails to offer much from the perspective of African American principals. Given the increasing number of schools with a majority of African American students, leadership theory, preparation, and practice must be approached from a broader perspective that includes the scholarship and knowledge of African Americans (F. Brown, 2005).

The factors relating to the achievement gap including poverty, parents level of education, effectiveness of teachers and many others are well documented. It is not as clear how these factors can systematically be mitigated leading to a closing of the gap.

Therefore, more research is necessary. White-Smith (2012) writes, “Understanding how principals encourage and deliver instructional excellence is crucial to implementing successful urban school reform” (p. 6).

### **Summary**

To close the achievement gap, principals and school teams must have the ability to meet the diverse needs of their students. SEL is sometimes called the missing piece, because it links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general. Research suggests that for students to be successful and increase student achievement, it is necessary for them to enter kindergarten with “strong social and emotional skills” (George, 2018, p. 29). When students enter school without these skills it is necessary to provide instruction and opportunities to practice learned skills (George, 2018). The CASEL framework supports the implementation of SEL not only school wide but districtwide to ensure the success of all students. The review of the literature revealed that despite several attempts to close the achievement gap in the United States through a variety of programs and policies the gap continues to widen.

Chapter II presented a review of the existing theories and literature relevant to the study. Chapter III presents the methodology and rationale for the selection used to conduct this study. Chapter IV presents the findings based on data collection methodologies selected for this study. Finally, Chapter V presents the findings, conclusion, implications for the study findings, and recommendations for future research.

## **Synthesis Matrix**

A synthesis matrix (see Appendix A) was used by the researcher to organize variables presented in the review of the literature. The synthesis matrix shows data on the variable and cites the author. The synthesis matrix is a strategy used by researchers to show agreement between various research studies and authors concerning variables being studied. The synthesis matrix contributes to the validity of study variables.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

This chapter is focused on the strategies African American elementary school principals (TK-6) in Riverside County, California use to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students. These principals could serve in grades kindergarten to Grade 6 in whatever configuration of Grades TK-6 a district provides. A qualitative research design was chosen to allow for an in-depth study of effective strategies, using a set of interviews with African American TK-6 school principals.

The purpose statement and research questions are followed by the research design with cited references to discuss the chosen methodology. The population and research sample are stated in addition to the process developed to validate and implement the interview process. The procedures for analyzing the data are presented. Lastly, the methodology chapter lists the limitations of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals (Grades TK-6) in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. An additional purpose of the study was to understand the strategies within CASEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by African American elementary school principals in these counties.

## **Central Research Questions**

This phenomenological study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do African American elementary school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making?
2. What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

Six research questions were developed to help answer the main research questions.

1. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?
2. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?

3. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?
4. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?
5. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?
6. Which of the best practices implemented within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by African American elementary school principals?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this phenomenological study.

Phenomenological studies “describe the meanings of lived experiences” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 24). A phenomenological study was used to study the lived experiences of TK-6 African American principals. This technique involves the use of

interviews, “directed toward understanding their perspectives on their everyday lived experience with the phenomenon” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 356).

Phenomenology in qualitative research, “directs qualitative inquirers to ask, what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2014, p. 571). A phenomenological design was chosen for this study as it allows the African American elementary principals to describe the lived experience of using specific strategies to address the needs of African American students to close the achievement gap. This study required interviewing TK-6 African American principals across multiple districts in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, California. A qualitative research design was chosen to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside County to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.

Interviews of African American principals were conducted to understand their lived experiences. The interview questions were developed using semi-structured open-ended questions and the synthesis matrix. The interviewer followed a script, and all participants were asked the same questions. The data were collected, aggregated, coded, and analyzed using the program NVivo, to identify the themes that emerged from the participant interviews.

### **Population**

A population is the “group in which researchers are ultimately interested” (Patten, 2012, p. 45). P. Williams (2014) defines a population as the “larger set of all individuals in which an experimenter is interested” (p. 6). Populations may be small or large. If the population is large, “it is more efficient to study a sample instead of conducting a census”

(Patten, 2012, p. 45). TK-12 schools may include elementary, middle, or high schools in any combination or independently. For this study, it is only the principals of grades TK-6 grade that are considered. It is the principals of these schools that form the population for this study. According to the California Department of Education (2020), there are currently 27,631 school principals and of those, 2,131 are African American. The population for this study was the 2,131 African American school principals in California.

### **Target Population**

According to J. Creswell (2014), the target population is the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010a). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population *samples* from within a larger group.

There are an estimated 784 African American elementary school principals in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, California. The target population for this study was the estimated 784 African American elementary school principals in these counties (see Table 1).



Table 1

*African American Principals in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, California*

California Counties	Total African American Principals	Estimated K-6th	Estimated 8th-9th	Estimated 9th-12th
-	-	58.33%	16.67%	33.33%
Los Angeles	968	561	326	189
Riverside	114	66	38	22
San Bernardino	171	99	58	33
San Diego	98	57	33	19
Total	1351	784	454	264

*Note.* Adapted from the California Department of Education, n.d. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

### Sample

A sample consists of “a set of individuals assessed in an experiment” (P. Williams, 2004, p. 378). In other words, the sample “is a subset of a population” (P. Williams, 2004, p. 7). A sample is also referred to as, “the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 129). When a sample is used, it allows the researcher to make inferences regarding the population. The quality of the sample is very important as it, “affects the quality of the inferences made from a sample to the population. Random sampling ensures that each member of the population, that every case had a known probability of being drawn for a sample” (Patton, 2014, p. 1363). However, for qualitative studies it is much more realistic to use purposeful sample selection to assure the subjects of the study meet the criteria to provide rich data specifically pertaining to the study purpose of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b).

## **Sample Size**

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions will lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. For phenomenological studies, J. W. Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990). For this study, 12 African American elementary school principals were included in this sample.

## **Purposeful and Convenience Sampling**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that purposeful sampling provides researchers a selection of “particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest” (p. 138). The strategy employed to identify the participants was criterion sampling based on the research problem, purpose, and questions. The criterion sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria (Patton, 2014). The following criteria were established to select eligible participants for this study:

- School Principal of African American race
- School Principal of a school that serves 7% or more African American students

- School Principal for a minimum of three years
- School Principal that has received district, county, or other recognition for outstanding service as a principal

In addition, the convenience sampling strategy allows a qualitative researcher to establish an accessible sample based on location and time (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 2014).

In this study, the convenience sampling strategy was simultaneously applied with the purposeful sampling strategy to identify participants who met the criteria and were conveniently accessible to the researcher (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 2014).

### **Sample Selection Process**

The researcher sent requests to all districts within in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties requesting permission to conduct the research study in their district.

1. Each district was asked to provide a list of African American elementary school principals in their district that met the selection criteria.
2. After obtaining permission, the researcher contacted each identified school principal by email and requested their participation in the study.
3. From those principals agreeing to participate, the researcher selected 12 participants with an effort to spread the participants throughout the districts.
4. Those principals selected to participate were provided the purpose of the study and a request for their voluntary participation along with informed consent materials (see Appendix B, C, and D).
5. Interviews were scheduled and conducted via Zoom or another remote teleconferencing technology due to COVID-19 contact restrictions.

## **Instrumentation**

In qualitative research the five methods of gathering data include: (a) observation, (b) interviews, (c) questionnaires, (d) document review, and (e) audiovisual materials (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b). Qualitative research explores the meaning of people's experiences, cultures or a particular issue. "Qualitative research inquiries into, documents, and interprets the meaning making process" (Patton, 2014, p. 46); It is personal. In qualitative research data is gathered and analyzed through "the use of informed judgment to identify major and monitor themes expressed by participants" (Patten, 2012, p. 9). Patton notes that, "the researcher is the instrument of inquiry" (Patton, 2014, p. 46).

The researcher in this study was previously a principal of a TK-12 public school, which potentially could bring a bias to the study based on personal experiences in a similar setting to those which were studied. According to Patton (2014) your personal experiences and interests become a part of your methodology.

This qualitative study used semi-structured open-ended interview questions to determine how African American TK-6 principals perceived the achievement gap for African American students and what they determined to be the best strategies for addressing the achievement gap based upon the five domains of CASEL. A total of 15 participants supplied verbal responses to the interview questions. The interviews were recorded using Zoom technology and the responses were later transcribed to a word document. Participants were not time limited and were able to take as much time as desired to respond to the questions.

The researcher wrote quick notes during the interview to capture unique details of the interview; however, for the most part gave undivided attention to the participants to encourage the free flow conversation. On average interviews took 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Following the interview completion, the researcher transcribed all verbal responses to a word document.

Following the transcribing of all interviews the researcher utilized the NVivo 12 software program. NVivo software is used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. It provides a place to organize, store and retrieve data. The researcher utilized NVivo to categorize and analyze data into emerging themes. Through the use of NVivo software the researcher was able to quickly find connections and themes in the data.

### **Instrument Development**

The researcher designed and developed the interview protocol used with each African American TK-6 principal using variables from the CASEL SEL core competencies (see Appendix E). The interview questions sought to ascertain African American TK-6 Principals perspectives on closing the achievement gap for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. Additional questions sought to identify the CASEL SEL core competencies perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside County, California. Responses to each interview question were analyzed for reliability and validity prior to being used with the sample population for this study.

## **Reliability**

“To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601). Some researchers believe the term reliability has no place in qualitative research and instead terms such as credibility, neutrality, confirmability, consistency, dependability, applicability and transferability should be used. (Golafshani, 2003). To ensure the reliability of a study is to “eliminate bias and increase the researcher’s truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604).

## **Field Test**

A field test interview was administered using the instrument previewed by the dissertation committee and observed by a Brandman University E.D. graduate, who has experience in qualitative research and interviewing participants. The qualified, non-participating principal agreed to participate as a test participant to test the process and instrument. After the test interview, the participant was asked for feedback as to the clarity and understanding of the questions, the format of the instrument, and structure of the process. Similarly, the qualified observer was asked to provide responses to the clarity of questions, format of the instrument, and structure of the process. Similarly, the qualified observer was asked to provide responses to the clarity of questions, format of the instrument, and structure of the process. In addition to providing their own observations which may lead to bias, and how to overcome the bias. Feedback was documented from both the observer and test participant. The feedback was discussed with the dissertation committee and adjustments made based on the feedback.

## **Validity**

Validity refers to the “degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomenon and the realities of the world” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 330). It addresses the question of whether or not the researcher actually observed what they thought they did. There are 10 possible strategies to enhance validity identified by McMillan and Schumacher (2010b) including:

- Prolonged and persistent fieldwork
- Multimethod strategies
- Participant language; verbatim accounts
- Low-inference descriptors
- Multiple researchers
- Mechanically recorded data
- Participant researcher
- Member checking
- Participant review
- Negative or discrepant data

It is suggested that researchers “use as many strategies as possible” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010b, p. 331) to ensure design validity. Validity strategies used in this research include mechanically recorded data utilizing digital recording and participant review involving the participants reviewing a synthesis of the interview. In qualitative research the concept of validity means the “study findings are accurate or true not only from the standpoint of the researcher but also from that of the participants and the readers” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 319).

## **Interview Question Development Matrix**

As a validity measure, the researcher used an Interview Question Development Matrix (IQDM) designed to directly align the interview questions with the research questions and variables of the study (see Appendix F). The use of the IQDM assures validity in that the data gathered directly addresses the research questions and variables of the study.

## **Data Collection**

As per institutional program policy, no data was collected for this study until permission to conduct the study was attained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix G). The principal goal of Institutional Review Boards is to protect human subjects and ensure the highest possible research quality (Enfield & Truwit, 2008). Once granted permission to conduct the study, the researcher first contacted the assistant superintendents of each selected school district via email with a request to participate in the study. The purpose and intent of the study were shared, and the assistant superintendents were apprised of and provided the study parameters, their participation rights, confidentiality agreements and the IRB Bill of Rights (see Appendix H). The assistant superintendents who were interested in participating in the study were then asked to provide a list of the African American TK-6 principals who met the criteria and for permission to contact them by the researcher. Once the list of referred participants was obtained the researcher contacted each principal individually by email and shared the aforementioned documents with them with a request to sign and return the informed consent form to the researcher.

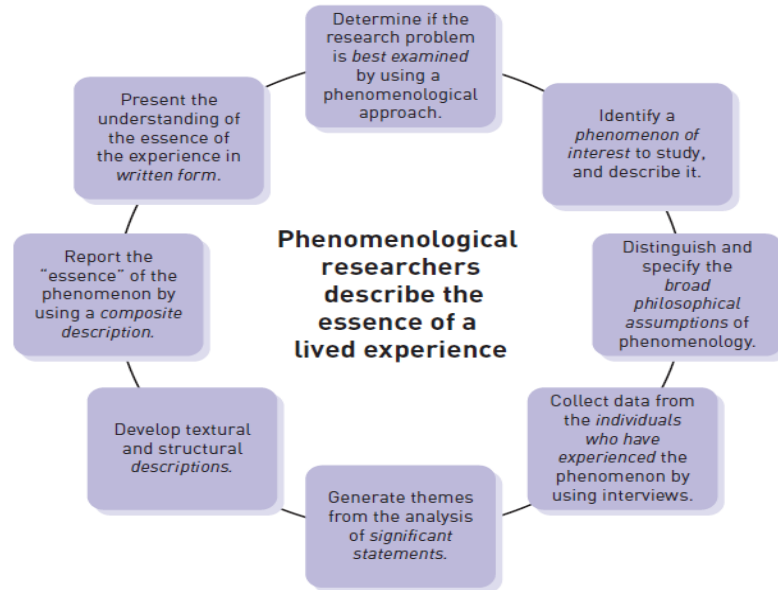


For this study, the researcher met with the 15 African American K-6 principals from across Riverside County in California for the semi-structured interviews. An interview script was used for each interview. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, a digital platform. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. To ensure data collection, the participant responses were recorded and transcribed. The researcher sent each interviewee their transcript from their interview to review and check for accuracy. The transcripts were then sorted, coded, and analyzed for patterns and themes using the NVIVO software program.

### **Data Analysis**

Methodology is the procedures followed in qualitative research (J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2016). “During the data analysis the researcher follows a path of analyzing the data to develop an increasingly detailed knowledge of the topic being studied” (J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 21). Participants in this study were interviewed using a field-tested interview protocol. The interview responses from each participant were recorded and then transcribed and coded for themes and patterns. The researcher first compiled the data from the interviews into frequency tables listing the six interview questions with the 15 African American TK-6 principals’ responses to each question. The table captured each interviewee’s response to all of the questions. The researcher analyzed and summarized the data collected and then the information was uploaded into NVivo, a software program for coding qualitative data and analysis. The researcher then summarized the most popular themes by research question that emerged from the overall analysis. Next the researcher developed textual and structural descriptions of what the participants described (J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2016). Finally, the researcher developed a

composite description and presents the findings in written form. This process is illustrated Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Procedures for conducting phenomenological research. Adapted from “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches,” by J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, 2016, p. 81. Sage Publications.

The coding process was used to reduce the data into meaningful segments called themes and giving the segments names. The data was then represented as figures, tables, or a narrative explanation. The frequency of the themes was counted and charted according to the frequency count. “The process of coding is central to qualitative research and involves making sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and documents” (J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 190). J. W. Creswell and Poth (2016) recommend a code list of no more than 25-30 categories and then working to reduce those down to five or six themes used to write the narrative. The charting of the coding was done from the highest frequency to the lowest frequency.

### **Inter-Coder Reliability**

As an additional measure to assure the accuracy, reliability and validity of the data analysis a colleague familiar with the coding process served as an inter-coder by coding 20% of the data. The results of the inter-coder were compared to the results of the researcher looking for a 90% match. If discrepancies were found beyond 90%, the coder and researcher compared results, adjusted, and the researcher reviewed the remaining data for adjustments based on this conversation and comparison.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations anticipated for this study. The small sample size which was limited to African American TK-6 principals in Riverside County. Second, the researcher served as a continuation principal for two years which could present a bias based on the researcher's experiences with the achievement gap. Chenail (2011), notes that bias management can be a major challenge when the "investigator is a member of the population itself" (p. 255). Another potential bias limitation is construct bias due to measuring with a single instrument in this case the CASEL scale of SEL.

### **Summary**

Chapter III included a detailed description of the methodology used for this study. The research questions, the qualitative research design method, and the population sample selection processes were reviewed. The instrumentation, data collection process, data analysis, and projected limitations for the study were also discussed. This paper includes data collection in the form of interviews. Fifteen African American TK-6 principals were interviewed for their perspectives on the achievement gap as it pertains to African American students. For this study, the researcher sought to identify and describe

the strategies implemented by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside County to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students. Chapter IV summarizes and display's the data as findings of the study, and Chapter V presents the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins with an overview of the chapter, a review of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research methodology, the procedure for data collection and analysis, and population and sample. The data from each participant is presented according to themes in responses to research questions. In addition, the data is presented as overarching themes developed from all participants in relation to their answers to research questions. The summary of findings in the study concludes this chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals (Grades TK-6) in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. An additional purpose of the study was to understand the strategies within CASEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by African American elementary school principals in these counties.

### **Central Research Questions**

This phenomenological study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do African American elementary school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California identify and

describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making?

2. What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

Six research questions were developed to help answer the main research questions.

1. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?
2. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?
3. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?

4. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?
5. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?
6. Which of the best practices implemented within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by African American elementary school principals?

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This qualitative study used semi-structured open-ended interview questions to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American principals to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.

The interviews consisted of two main questions and six sub-questions. Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were designed to answer Research Question 1 regarding identifying and describing the strategies implemented by African American principals to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students. Interview Question 6 was designed to answer Research Question 2 regarding which strategy was perceived as the most important by African American elementary school principals.

Each participant was provided with a copy of the Research Participant's Bill of Rights along with the details of the study. After obtaining approval from each participant, each interview was conducted via the zoom video virtual conference app. The digitally recorded data from the interview was transcribed using Microsoft 365. These transcripts were reviewed by each participant to ensure accuracy of the interviews. The verified transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, a coding software used for qualitative data analysis.

Following the interviews, the researcher independently coded the transcripts to identify patterns and themes among participant's responses. Appendix I contains a summary of the research methods used in the research study and the procedures used to collect data.

### **Population**

The population for this study was the 2,131 African American school principals in California. Riverside County.

### **Sample**

The strategy employed to identify the participants was criterion sampling based on the research problem, purpose, and questions. The criterion sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria (Patton, 2014). The following criteria were established to select eligible participants for this study:

- School Principal of African American race.
- School Principal of a school that serves 7% or more African American students.
- School Principal for a minimum of three years.



- School Principal that has received District, County, or other recognition for outstanding service as a principal.

In addition, the convenience sampling strategy allows a qualitative researcher to establish an accessible sample based on location and time (Marshall, 1996; Patton 2014). In this study, the convenience sampling strategy was simultaneously applied with the purposeful sampling strategy to identify participants who met the criteria and were conveniently accessible to the researcher (Marshall, 1996; Patton 2014).

The researcher contacted 16 potential participants individually and invited them to participate in the study. Twelve of the participants confirmed and set up an interview data and time. The remaining four participants did not respond; therefore, an official interview did not take place. The research included nine principals from Moreno Valley and three principals from Riverside Unified School districts, in southern California for a total of 12 participants. Table 2 provides a categorization of the participants.

Table 2

*Characteristics of Participants*

Participant	African American Student Percentage	Principal Years of Experience	District
Participant 1	11%	5	Moreno Valley
Participant 2	13%	3	Riverside
Participant 3	15%	13	Moreno Valley
Participant 4	20%	5	Moreno Valley
Participant 5	9%	3	Moreno Valley
Participant 6	7%	4	Riverside
Participant 7	24%	3	Moreno Valley
Participant 8	12%	7	Moreno Valley
Participant 9	14%	12	Moreno Valley
Participant 10	23%	16	Moreno Valley
Participant 11	14%	6	Moreno Valley
Participant 12	12%	8	Riverside

*Note.* All districts are part of a unified school district.

## Presentation and Analysis of Data

### Data Analysis by Participant

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 has been an elementary principal for five years and has worked in education for 21 years. Participant 1 is at a school site with 11.4% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 1 responded citing two strategies used to close the achievement gap. Goal setting was used “to create multi-tiered systems of support to look at how can we specifically target the student population with services for academics” (Participant 1). Organizational skills were also cited. Participant 1 stated that the African American students at this school outperformed African American students across the district, “Because of that formula of attacking them from all sides, providing these services, changing staff perspectives of these kids, and having the program be something that was positive in just everything that we did.”

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 1 cited three strategies. The first strategy cited was identifying emotions. Participant 1 described, “We would literally kind of get in a circle and talk

about a situation that happened on campus that involved them responding in an inappropriate way and make them kind of go through that metacognition of thinking about their thinking.” Participant 1 also cited accurate self-perception and reported that, “Many African American students had no self-perceptions. Students were described as, “They didn't see the behavior that they were distributing as negative or positive. You know, but then I had to give them through the different things that we did and the mentors that were there, and the activities that we did, I had to give them perspective on, this is how this behavior is viewed.” The third strategy cited was self-confidence. “One of the things they ended up discovering was their self-confidence was increased when they realized that they could behave a different way” (Participant 1).

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 1 cited the strategy of perception in the context of teachers having a perspective of how students should behave. When students didn't behave in that particular way that matched their perspective-taking then, “they viewed the students as throw away kids” (Participant 1). This resulted in Participant 1 having to build the capacity of the staff to understand what students were dealing with on a day to day basis. Time had to be spent defining what trauma informed practice was and knowledge of unconscious bias.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 1 cited four strategies used for relationship skills including communication, relationship building, social engagement and teamwork. Relationship building is a strategy to close the achievement gap while ensuring everyone is defining what that means in the same way. To build relationships it's important to teach about communication. "Communication is not just verbal so we have literally a professional development around what is communication and what does it look like and what are the messages that I'm sending to other people" (Participant 1). Participant one notes that teaching about communication, "was like you have to literally take the things that students are doing and not look at it like they're trying to be defiant, but that they're trying to communicate it in a way that's not acceptable" (Participant 1). Participant 1 cited that in the area of social engagement students are taught that some things are acceptable at home and some are acceptable at school. What is important is to understand that students have different norms. "Another thing that I was careful to let staff know is, we don't want students to feel like them doing things a different way is wrong. It's just that in this setting or this environment it's not socially acceptable" (Participant 1). Participant 1 also used the strategy of teamwork to close the achievement gap. "Because we're a team we may all have different roles, but each of our roles are important" (Participant 1). Participant 1 compared teamwork to the body by stating, "If I stubbed my toe on a chair, even though that toe may be very small, and maybe it seems very insignificant when it's hurting my whole-body hurts."

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 1 cited three strategies used to close the achievement gap in this area including identifying problems, analyzing situations and solving problems. Participant 1 detailed how restorative circles are used.

So, a teacher has a restorative justice circle because there's students in the classroom that are picking on each other. They get in a circle. They're discussing what the problem is. Why is this happening? They're analyzing it. They're going through all of those steps, because to me those are steps of problem solving and they're going through that to restore a positive climate in that classroom.

(Participant 1)

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 1 cited self-confidence as the most important strategy and stated:

If you can get a student or you can get any person to realize that they are the ones that are in control of their destiny, that they alone not who they were born to, not which teacher did they get, not how much money do they have, not how many. None of that, none of that is the determining factor in the end. If you could get them to realize that you have struck gold.

Table 3 Summarizes Participant 1s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 3

*Participant 1: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Organizational skills</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying emotions</li> <li>• Self-Perception</li> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-Taking</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 has been an elementary principal for three years and has worked in education for 20 years. Participant 2 is at a school site with 13% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 2 cited that she focused more on self-discipline and impulse control in regards to closing the achievement gap for African American students. She explained that,

Those two more because I think oftentimes our children are identified or categorized as disruptive or defiant. I think that in teaching them how to have more self-control, more self-discipline recognizing triggers and triggers trauma that it helps them to be engaged in the lesson more and to really be a part of the classroom conversation and a part of that. That space where their voices are heard. (Participant 2)

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 2 cited identifying emotions and accurate self-perception as two strategies used to close the achievement gap. Participant 2 stated the following:

In regards to self-awareness, if we look at it from an emotional standpoint, I think helping students to regulate their behavior is important to me and in regulating their behavior is also a part of having them acknowledge who they are and to validate them as well. So, for example, if a student you know says well she kicked me out of class because I was talking too much or because I was talking too loud and I would just say to them,

Look, I recognize when you're home you probably do, you know, talk a little louder. I have this identification with them about my family when we're all together. You know, we all kind of talk at the same time and we have an elevated voice level and tone, so I get it, however, you're in a place of learning, so when you go back into the classroom, I need you to just kind of be aware and recognize the setting that you're in and just kind of pick up on the nuances of what, how we engage in a classroom in an educational setting. Now, when you're on the playground, or when you're at lunch, that's an opportunity for you, to, you know, to talk to your friends and, respond to them in a way that that you naturally would.

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 2 detailed that, “This is a conversation in regards to respect of others that I have quite often with staff and with students. I think it's a two prong kind of process or situation.” Participant 2 noted that her school has double the percentage of African American students across the district, however, she only has one African



American teacher on staff. She outlines how that's already a problem with representation.

The staff is an older staff and so I also have to look at the mindset of where they're coming from, where kids speak when spoken to. They feel the students owe them respect.

Kids also deserve respect. I talk to students with the same level of respect that I talk to adults. Having that high expectation of respect, means calling people out when they are disrespectful not in a way that's demeaning or confrontational or in front of students, but just letting people know that I recognize the undertones. I always have conversations with kids when they are disrespectful to adults and I asked them, 'Have I ever disrespected you? Did your teacher disrespect you? So, let's talk about respect and disrespect.' Students will say, 'why do you call me, Mr.?' I tell them, 'To show you respect, you call me [redacted], so I'm going to call you Mr. [redacted].'

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 2 notes she uses relationship building to close the achievement gap. She describes how her high visibility allows her to build relationships with families. One way she does that is by attending IEP and 504 meetings. Attending those meetings allows her to ensure that she knows the stories of the families, so when she does have to discipline, she has some context. Another reason she provides for attending IEP and 504

meetings is due to, “The fast tracking that occurs when they have maladaptive behaviors in a class. It’s important to understand is this a behavior issue or is this an academic issue?” (Participant 2).

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 2 said,

I believe in identifying problems and then determining which way to go with that. You know that ethics get involved, so for example, last year we had students who were wearing doo rags to school and so it became this big issue. They can't wear those, have those on. Shortly thereafter, I talked to the students and I told them, ‘I'm just gonna be honest with you, I wear a headscarf at night, but I wouldn't necessarily wear it to work. So your doo rag is something that you shouldn't wear to work.’ In January I went to a training on new laws and assembly bills and all of that in the natural Hair Care Act had come out, in regards to protective styles and a doo rag is considered part of a protective style. And so, I came back and I told the teachers, I said, ‘I'm just going to let you know that new legislation has passed and the kiddos can wear doo rags if they want to.’ And I'm going to have that conversation with them and I did it. There was a group of African American and Hispanic students. I told them, I said, ‘you're able to wear that just like anything else, as long as it doesn't become a distraction or disruption to the learning environment. So, you can wear it. It's fine.’ One of the staff members

said, 'Why are you telling them that?' Because we're raising them to be informed citizens of this country and they need to know about their rights. But just like any other, if there's a, White student with a hat on - if he becomes disruptive and throws it across the class well I'm going to take it, if he throws his doo rag across the class, then we'll have that conversation.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 2 responded citing,

I think relationship building is the most essential and I say that because, I know the benefit of having solid relationships and foundations with students. Because when I have that type of relationship with them, it builds trust and when I have that trust they become better at risk taking and they are more prone to want to do things to prove to me to me and to others that 'hey, I can do this or I am interested. I am motivated.' Often African American male students will come in and, they just assume that they're automatically in trouble. And I always make sure I preface a conversation with, 'Hey, we're just having a conversation. I want to get your side of the story.' That's why due process is super, super important and I want to make sure that kids know that I hear them and that I see them. You can't discipline someone that you don't care about, and so when people say, 'I think teachers should have guns in school. I think we should bring back corporal punishment,' I say, 'No, because not everybody is at the right mindset to

discipline someone else's child.' Because if you don't look at students, every one of your students regardless of their skin color as potentially being your own child, then you don't belong in the seat.

Table 4 Summarizes Participant 2s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 4

*Participant 2: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> <li>• Impulse Control</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Emotions</li> <li>• Accurate Self-Perception</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for Others</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 has been an elementary principal for 13 years and has worked in education for 21 years. Participant 3 is at a school site with 15.1% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 3 cited two strategies used to close the achievement gap: stress management and goal setting.

Stress management has been on the forefront lately and something that I've really utilized, especially having SEL programs and supports with our students over the last few years. We've been doing this almost five to seven years at my site, making sure that we have mindful moments. It is used sometimes to deescalate and for students to self-regulate. In addition, we find that helps with dealing with impulse control and the ability to focus. (Participant 3)

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 3 identified two strategies used to close the achievement gap: identifying emotions and recognizing strengths.

We are in the process of becoming an International Baccalaureate (IB) school and it's all based on critical thinking and inquiry-based learning. The students are in

the driver's seat of what they want to learn. Teachers just help facilitate how they want to learn it. As we align learning to the standards, there's a gateway. Part of that process is ensuring that students are emotionally well and that they have a voice, are aware of how they were, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and we try to pull that out and provide individual opportunities for students to be able to explore that.

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 3 cites using four strategies to close the achievement gap including perspective taking, empathy, appreciating diversity and respect for others.

It's all part of our SEL block and our character building and who we are here on campus and how we learn, and what we make a priority. Appreciating diversity and others is also part of our IB initiative. It focuses on global learners. It gives opportunity to be accepting and to have an avenue to pursue and learn about other cultures. Part of the curriculum is having empathy towards one another, being able to diplomatically share your perception and to be able to understand someone else. We also pick writing topics and things like that where students have to synthesize two opposing opinions.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 3 addressed this research question by stating, “We really have taken a lot of time to focus on our African American students in terms of their engagement strategies, working together with others, and being able to socially interact.”

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 3 listed (a) identifying problems, (b) analyzing situations, (c) solving problems, and (d) reflecting as strategies used to close the achievement gap. Participant 13 stated the following:

For example, in one of my classrooms the teacher has like a problem box and I know it sounds very elementary, no pun intended. But if there was some sort of conflict or something throughout the day that students write it down and they put it in the box and before they leave, part of their exit ticket is to circle up again and to talk about it. The class talks about and it's anonymous. The class kind of works through the problem of how this person could have solved this situation, and I mean, that's just one example that comes to mind.

In addition, Participant 3 discussed how reflecting on the situation supports closing the achievement gap.

We always try to definitely reflect on their role. For example, we have a refocus room here at our school site. Students complete a reflection sheet that includes

some skill building lessons, specifically one on one with the counselor. The goal is to correct and reframe that thinking to try to deter future instances or to at least provide the child with an arsenal of skills to be able to pull from to navigate that situation a little bit more beneficially for them in the world.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 3 selected self-confidence as the most important strategy and stated, “Having self-confidence, I think is probably the most important strategy to close the achievement gap. If you are confident in yourself, you have the mental wherewithal to be able to respect others because you respect yourself.”

Table 5 Summarizes Participant 3s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 5

*Participant 3: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress Management</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Emotions</li> <li>• Recognizing Strengths</li> </ul>

(continued)



Table 5

*Participant 3: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective Taking</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> <li>• Respect for others</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Engagement</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 has been an elementary principal for five years and has worked in education for 29 years. Participant 4 is at a school site with 19.6% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 4 cited self-control, self-discipline and organizational skills as strategies used to close the achievement gap, and stated,

In regards to self-discipline and self-motivation or self-control, every time we have our tier one input, our tier one strategies that we implement for PBIS and part of that is to get students to be aware of their our behavior expectations that they need to add. To help them with it is to create an awareness first and then create the opportunity to actually practice those particular skills. And if something happens, it doesn't really matter. The degree of what an incident occurs, it is an opportunity to talk to kids, to walk them through it to. Self-reflect on what they did, how they responded and then what they could do in the future so it helps them to better self-control and self-manage themselves in in similar situation.

It's important to get teachers also to recognize in the context of their classrooms, they really have to spend time helping students become aware of the norms and how they correspond or how they interact in the context of those norms and all that really looks at self-control. Students don't just wake up one morning and say, 'OK, I'm going to be self-controlled or I'm going to navigate through difficult situations, especially when I'm frustrated.' These are skills that must be taught.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to*

*close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

I focus on the emotions and the self-confidence, because again, when you're talking about helping students navigate their feelings and part of that is the effort and this is a school wide effort and this is something we do talk about. You have to help students become aware of how they're responding and what their emotional mindsets are, because if you don't do that, then they don't understand the differences and students tend to react based on their environment, so if their home life models that 'I'm explosive or I don't say trivial things.' You have to get them to recognize what's bothering them. Let's talk about how we're going to respond to this appropriately, and then what can I do to address it? And part of that addressing is having self-confidence.

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 4 stated:

Part of what the challenges are as an administrator and school staff is to ensure that teachers really spend a lot of time building relationships with their kids and to build relationships means that you have to allow the students to kind of share who and what they are, either their culture, their diversity, their trauma, whatever it may be, so that there's empathy. Understanding how the child became that child and, and that's the challenge that we have as educators is to create that connection,

although when we look at the demographics of our staffing population, it rarely matches the community that they serve well in this context. In Moreno Valley, it does not match the community that we serve, so that creates these perceptions, and they're not necessarily right or wrong, but they are there, and that creates a barrier for teachers and educators and staff to develop empathy with their clientele, their students, and in the context of that gap, or that lack of empathy creates, really this lack of respect. Then you have a lot of children who feel disrespected even though they may not truly understand what that term means. In the context in which it's applied, they just feel like they're not being recognized for who and what they are for whatever reason.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

I will say social engagement and relationship building go kind of hand in hand, especially if you're talking about your responsibility as a teacher, you're imparting skills and knowledge to a child, but part of that is that you're developing a structure, a context of how students are interacting with and in an environment that replicates the work environment. You have someone who is giving directions or giving information or basically the boss or the manager of that environment and facilitating it. You also have students who are working together to accomplish a common goal and if you do it well, the students understand this is how I contribute in society in a community, especially in a work environment on

social environment that I'm interacting with others to produce something or make something or to achieve a common goal. (Participant 4)

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 4 stated,

The key part for me would probably be identifying what the problem is and then really exploring that, because if you write it off, you don't give an opportunity to learn, or you don't give an opportunity to address the root cause. Depending on the data analysis you're identifying and you're making sure you're drilling down to either that subgroup population or whatever that root deficiency is, so you know exactly what the target is moving forward, or provide an opportunity to address it in a way which you're building that skill. You have to address the problem and then you have to figure out what's an appropriate consequence.

I think probably the biggest component of all this is recognizing identifying the problem and then trying to analyze it. 'How am I going to resolve it moving forward?' but you also want to self-reflect. Everybody needs to self-reflection on that because that we gauge and progress monitor ourselves and our social context.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 4 shared the following,

The foundation of everything is communication, if you're able to get all the participants no matter who they are no matter what they are to effectively communicate not only their context, but also their emotional state without the fear of retribution or without concern about putting themselves at a disadvantage in regards to either self-perception, self-aware. When there's silence and there's no words or there's no communication being shared you're forced to speculate and the speculation leads to so many problems and misconceptions. Students don't feel valued when they can't communicate or they're not communicating effectively and people are having knee jerk reactions to the communication. And so, I would say communication is the most important strategy.

Table 6 summarizes Participant 4s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 6

*Participant 4: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Control</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Emotions</li> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> <li>• Perspective Taking</li> <li>• Respect for Others</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 6

*Participant 4: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 has been an elementary principal for three years and has worked in education for 21 years. Participant 5 is at a school site with 9.2% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 5 cited,

My first focus is as far as closing that achievement gap is to somehow motivate the student to want to do it because we do need the student to participate. We have to be intentional and laser focused on what it is we want them to do and help

them to set goals towards reaching that. So, making sure to involve the student in the whole process.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

First of all, we will start with the accurate self-perception because a lot of times students don't even perceive or believe that they're able to do these things that we're wanting them to do so we start out with just letting them know. 'Yeah, you can do it. If you can't do it, you can't do it. Yeah, you're going to be able to do it.' So just letting them kind of see themselves succeeding and talking as far as also knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are your strengths and your areas of growth. Everybody has them and, reminding students that no one is strong in every area. I give them an example like, 'Miss Johnson needs help with this'. They'll see that this is just a human thing. And so, knowing what their strengths are and what they need, support in and then providing that support for them. When they begin to make strides towards growth or growing strides then I think it builds their confidence which enables them to try harder or have a productive struggle, or even try and not succeed. But have the confidence to keep trying again. Self-efficacy comes when all those other things are met. Just feeling that I have the ability to succeed. (Participant 5)

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*



*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

I could start straight out with the empathy part. If you don't have that, especially right now in the pandemic that we've lived in, I really have left many days thinking, 'Gosh, they're making it all about them.' Instead of having that empathy for what the child is going through or their family. Just because the parent is home doesn't mean they could be working at home too, so they're not just sitting right next to the student, so you know just to empathize with what is potentially some of the barriers or obstacles to the student's success, or just having that empathy to think? You know, maybe that parent worked the third shift and they just got off. Maybe they're trying to sit by their kid. But maybe they're nodding off. So, empathy to me is the first step just kind of putting yourself in that other person's shoes and the diversity. The diversity and the respect for others to me go hand in hand because you have to be willing to respect others. I know that they say sometimes you gotta give respect to get it.

I look at it differently, sometimes you have to give it even if you don't get it because you know we're setting examples here and know that people are going to be different. They can have the same skin color, but have a different environment been raised in a different environment, so there's diversity within races. There's diversity within socioeconomic groups and just respecting individuals. You know, I think it's very important and as far as perspective taking is just really looking at things from, you know the perspective of the others or just trying to see it from a different viewpoint. I saw this video and you looked at it, and, if you

hold your head straight and you looked at it, it looked one way. But then they told you to kind of turn your head and look like that and just by turning your head just a little bit and lowering your head. It changed the whole picture. So, perspective taking is important too. (Participant 5)

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 5 stated the following in response to Research Question 4:

This and the first one that I say is the communication part. We have to be able to communicate with each other and then from that communicate what the problem is. [When] I talked to my teachers, especially like in the PLC's because you know sometimes, especially with this distance learning and even before distance learning that the communication is all about what the student isn't doing. So, I always try to bring it back to say well what can we do? We know what the student is doing, but we're the professionals. What can the person with the certificate do? And that's what we want to focus on, because we need to communicate about what the issues are. When you want to make a change, you have to look at the relationship you're building with students.

When I was a Read 180 teacher I used to have those kids doing all kinds of things and let me tell you, very little of it had to do with Read 180. I found out that they wanted to talk to me. So, when I begin at the beginning of our rotations to give him three minutes every day, that's a total of 15 minutes a week. To just talk

about whatever, they want to, it really changed the way that the students performed and at the end of the year they were testing out of Read 180 and then you know my administrator was giving me all these accolades. Like, 'well, you really did it,' and I said 'the thing is, they did it for themselves. They realized that they could do it.' The fact that they tested two or three years out of Read 180 means that they were never Read 180. They were never motivated to work before. People just want to have that relationship. Relationships are so important. And as far as the teamwork, we all have to be about the business of students succeeding honestly, you know, just talking about how our African American students are doing. So what if 20% of them are proficient? That means 80% of them are not proficient. We have to decide as a team that this is worth us putting our time in and you know, dealing with the hard truth and dealing with parents and connecting with students too.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 5 stated,

As an administrator I'm going to start straight off with my ethical responsibility. I take it seriously, I do. I take it personal. I want to make sure that they're getting the best that they can get. We're the professionals. I'd like to say I'm the one with all the student loan debt.

It's not enough for teachers to show up and kids suggest Much Ado about nothing. Just passing year to year and never learning a thing that's dumb. That's a problem, and I know that this problem doesn't happen where there's less diversity. I mean, maybe it does happen, but not to the extremes that it's OK for us to ignore our responsibilities to our students and to our families. We have to identify the problem and that's number one. What is it? What is it about? You know [redacted]? What makes him unlearnable that he just isn't. What is it that takes something on the outside, or if it's something inside of you that reflecting part. You have to say 'don't I like this little boy?' Then they have to figure out a way to get over it. Because of course we like some people more than we like others, that's just human nature. We click with others, but we still should be able to treat everyone fairly and be the advocate for their growth and achievement. You have to identify what the problem is and analyze it like maybe if we do this, or maybe if we change students. Or maybe we try to get this parent involved, we have to look at what some of the issues are and just try to bridge. If we're really about big business, then we can't keep on doing the same thing. Solving the problem is a big deal to me because I feel like since I've been in education, we've done a lot of talking. Really, the conversation hasn't changed. It's always been the same. The problem has not been solved, maybe in some areas, but overall the problem remains. Are we not identifying what the problem is, or do we not care what the problem is? Or do we not want to reflect how we as an individual can make a difference and solve the problem? That goes back to that ethical responsibility I, as an educator, want to leave you better than what I found you.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Ethical responsibility, that's where as us as the professionals. We have that responsibility to whatever it is to peel back all the layers. And solve the problem. Umm, at least attempt to solve the problem. Give it our best guess. 'OK, that didn't work. Let's try this. Let's add this. It worked for these.' It's that ethical responsibility. It we have it. It's not enough to just say 'Oh well. It's been like this, you know, for a minute that kids just don't want to learn.' We are the professionals. (Participant 5)

Table 7 Summarizes participant 5s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 7

*Participant 5: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Motivation</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate Self-Perception</li> <li>• Recognizing Strengths</li> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating diversity</li> <li>• Respect for others</li> <li>• Perspective Taking</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 7

*Participant 5: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> </ul>

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 has been an elementary principal for four years and has worked in education for 21 years. Participant 6 is at a school site with 6.6% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 6 stated the following,

When I'm working with students and working with teachers specifically in the area of goal setting and organization, what's important to stress is students understanding and having the ability to interpret their own data test data. So they know the benchmarks and what they need to do to go to move forward. What I encourage my teachers to do is at the beginning of the year when we sit together

and or and they sit together with their students, they look at that initial benchmark data as they are having conferences with their students related to where they are currently performing.

Then they need to look at the angle and then as part of that organization is then what am I going to do and what are my benchmarks going to be in between to set some progress monitoring goals for myself as a student? And then for the teacher to follow up on and then we may talk about it later within the interview is with that what type of instructional strategies are going to be put in place from the teachers to follow through with the students. Up to ensure that they reach that goal or that benchmark, but that first piece is making sure that students have an identified goal. They know what the goal is in that organizational piece and planning to be able to get there if we don't know what that goal is and what we're shooting for, then it is hard for us to be focused in our approach.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 6 cited using identifying emotions and accurate self-perception as strategies to close the achievement gap and stated the following:

A lot of our African American children are not accustomed to seeing leaders at school that look like them. It really helps, you know, for me to be there and for me to be here and for them to see someone in a leadership role that looks like them. With that perception, I just have very candid conversations with them.

One on one when I need to about, who's watching and how they should carry themselves and what my expectations are for them as students and individuals and then working with teachers.

The staff needs to help our students understand, recognize and be proud of who they are and their own self-image. We talk a lot about our scale level emotions and identifying our emotions and I've worked with my SAP counselor on different charts and helping them to understand what it looks like and what it feels and so with myself and with my staff is giving the kids permission to express their emotions and express it in the way that they feel most comfortable. I do have to sometimes educate staff on culture and things that may be perceived as disrespectful or outside of expectation. And culturally it is not so. Just as a parent with my own two children.

I teach my kids to question respectfully. I teach my kids to voice their opinion and how they feel in certain ways. Sometimes when those things come from our African American students, they are seeing that they are looked at differently than when we have students of other cultures and ethnicities. It helps my students and teachers to understand how to recognize those emotions. Validating what those emotions are, and then appropriately expressing them verbally. Your voice and your point is heard and not overshadowed by actions or tone or things that may be seen as physical aggression. And so, we talk about rating right now.

I'll tell kids, they'll tell me about the situation or tell the teacher the situation.

'OK, how are you feeling on our emotional scale? Well, I'm at. You know five or whatever. Think about what your reaction to that situation was. It was a 10.'



So, should our actions based on our emotions actually match how we feel and teaching my teachers to recognize that and see that and then teaching students how to make sure your behavior aligns with how you're feeling. The one thing with teachers is making sure that they validate what those feelings are without judging the behavior. That can take the relationship with the student in a different direction when they don't perceive that you are listening or really understand. I use some information given to me from my counselor as far as rating scales engaging. 'How you feel based upon your response to the situation?'

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 6 recounts looking at social awareness with a focus on student respect for others. Participant 6 shared the following:

The focus is for students of color as well as the entire school community. Looking at students of color is making sure that we respect the voice, making sure that we respect the choice of us. It is also about learning how to respectfully disagree.

When we have a different perspective one of the things that we do is utilize restorative practices. Using our circles and asking questions about how what you did made me feel and vice versa is getting the students to just really listen.

Students have to listen to someone else with an open ear with an open perspective and with an open mind with the intent of changing their personal behavior and not the behavior of the other. The hope is that when the other student is listening to

you they would have this same perspective. I've had to facilitate many circles. This is not a time where you're talking. This is a time where we're using our listening because we need to understand and be empathetic when we're in that place. That gives us the ability to understand how our actions made the other person feel.

When we come from the seeds of that place of empathy, then the hope is that will change and that will be more considerate of the other person and what they're going through. For some of my African American students, that's difficult because, they're in a place where they usually don't feel like they've been heard. It's teaching both sides and again going back to that perspective taking. And this is what they did to me and I get the place of hurt and repair that our African American students are in. I have to walk on that same line.

I facilitated small circles between a teacher and a student. And I'll prompt the teacher ahead of time. This is not the time for you to be right. This is the time for you to listen and you need to understand. You have to understand from a 10-year-old perspective. And listen to what it is they say they need. It has been demonstrated in the change in behavior with some of my students, that when we take the time to do that, it goes a long way toward building trust. With building relationship and just bringing about that change in the student's teachers will say, 'Well, [redacted] they may behave that way with you because you are African American. I say no, they behave that way with me because I listen. I listen, from the heart and from a perspective of wanting to understand, not feeling the need to correct.'

I'm also trained in love and logic, so those are other strategies. You know that I throw in when having to focus on empathy and showing respect for others. I'm just trying to get kids when dealing with one another to understand and trying to get teachers to understand their students. I tell them 'if you want to have the battle, you're going to battle all school year or do you want to understand them? I understand it takes time. But do you want to spend your time investing in something that will help benefit this student long term? You may not see the benefits this year in that class, but I tell you when that kid gets to 11th grade and they remember this moment and they come back to find you to say thank you. It's worth it, so do you want to spend the whole year battling and disrupting class because they don't understand that respect or empathy piece or do you want to take the time to pull that student to the side. Go through the circle questions and just listen?'

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 6 stated the following experiences with regard to Research Question 4, I think our relationship building through the lens of communication goes back to what I've previously talked about with restorative practices and using our circle building time to just be able to comfortably, without judgment and with a listening ear communicate how we feel. It doesn't bother me, but I give kids permission. You know if a curse word comes out every now and again. I just

want the student to speak and then we can go back and fix everything else and work on how we appropriately communicate. With teachers understanding the difference and the time to do that, when a student is frustrated. They just want to be heard. That's your time to just be an active listener. And that's all you need to do. We can go back and fix everything else.

With African American students, just getting them comfortable with communicating goes back to our relationship, building and trust. Because if we don't have that trust in that level of comfortability and belief that you care about me that communication is going to be different and it's going to be difficult, so it's helping my teachers to understand again the importance of taking that time to build that trust. Even in the most difficult times, a student will respond to you because they know that you believe in them and they have that trust in you.

They'll feel comfortable coming to you. One of my top five strengths is communication. I do way too much of it. Teaching kids how to effectively and appropriately use their voice to say how it is that they feel, and so our social engagement. So I always use the example. When I have kids that are fighting we talk about social engagement and again we come together in our circles. I use the example of myself. '[Redacted] has to make decisions every day. There are people that like it. There are people that don't. I get parents that look at me all the time and they send me nasty gram emails or whatever the case may be. What would it look like if I was out on the corner fighting with Miss such and such because she looked at me.' And usually they'll laugh. They'll chuckle, and I'm like that's 'funny, huh? But that's how you guys chose to communicate, because

it's still a form of communication. It's still a form of engagement. When you get out into the world outside of these school gates, is that the appropriate way for us to communicate and engage socially with one another? No.'

Those are strategies that teachers talk about with students on how to appropriately engage socially and communicate with students. As an African American leader, I can have those conversations directly with my kids. I tell students, 'I know it may not be fair, but this is the implication for you outside of this structured safe environment, if this is a skill that you do not obtain.' My secretary will laugh because if my door is open, she'll hear me talking to the kids and she's like 'I can't believe you said that,' and I'm like 'why not? Somebody has to.' I don't want this kid to walk outside of the gate and get beat up or jumped or shot or whatever the case may be, because somebody has not been honest with them about how they need and should conduct themselves in the world that they live in as an African American individual. I have a responsibility to do so.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 6 shared,

The steps that you identified, identify, analyze, evaluate, reflect those would be what we would call the cycle of inquiry. In going through the cycle of inquiry first identifying what our problems are. Where are gaps that that we need to close? So, when the first year, I came to this school the data here on the surface

was very good. That can sometimes result in a level of complacency. Year after year, the state data was very good. I came in with a different lens and, told the staff, let's break down this data and look at our subgroups and let's see if the data is equally as strong. We went to the next step of analyzing our African American subgroups and discovered they were performing at a rate that was far below our other subgroups, and even when I look in comparison to some of our academic English learners.

As a staff I did have several staff members that were like 'Oh my gosh,' because they had never looked at and gone through the cycle of inquiry. The proud moment for me was that the staff immediately began to talk about. Then what do we need to do as a group to better serve our African American community? I was super proud it wasn't a moment of excuses or deflection or you know, those students are in this situation because of this. It spoke to their level of professionalism.

Then what we had to do is begin to evaluate. I have some up on my board identifying the inequities at our school. First we had to acknowledge what the inequities were and I told them, 'some of the inequities that we create are not intentional.' It's those things where, 'Oh well, you know he didn't turn in his homework because his Mom does this, or you know whatever it is' and I said, 'but we create gaps. We shift our expectations based on this outside set of circumstances. Who created the gap? We did because we modified our expectations. That is something we can't do.' So, we looked at it as a whole, and

developed a list of inequities that we have at the school, one being our connection to our African American parents.

We looked at our connection to our African American students and educating ourselves on different strategies that may be more appropriate to the learning style and learning needs of our African American students. With COVID going into a time of distance learning has slowed that work down tremendously. The goal is we can begin to come together to continue that work next school year as a district.

In looking at responsible decision making, we did a book study on the book *Shattering Inequities* by Robin LaSalle. We need to eliminate inequities, or at least began to reduce and take things off of our board because they're impacting the way our students are achieving and it starts with our mindset as educators.

That's the first thing we're looking at. When addressing inequities, you have to be honest with yourself. Everyone has unconscious biases. If you're not honest with yourself from the start, it's going to be difficult for you to go through the analysis process. Tough decisions need to be made and the decisions are really going to be changes in your behavior as a professional. We need to work. We've done some mindset work, and now we have to get out of the check off box thinking that this is, something that [redacted] is having us to do.

It is going to take a lot of reflection on my part too because it's going to be some difficult conversations that I'm going to have with individuals as we go through that cycle and helping them understand the need to change and the need to make different decisions. I believe in my staff and I trust my staff and I think that we'll be able to get there.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 6 continued,

I think the most important strategy as it relates to closing the gap with our African American students would be appreciating diversity, and honoring who my kiddos and parents are as African American parents. Respecting that. Recognizing and honoring that diversity and that it is OK. It may look different, but it's OK. And to understand that diversity, because then that's going to impact how you interact with that student, how you interact with his or her mom, his or her dad, or, whatever the family unit may be. But really? Really appreciating the diversity because in the climate that we're in now, our students don't feel that. They don't feel like who they are, is recognized, appreciated, or valued.

Table 8 Summarizes Participant 6s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.



Table 8

*Participant 6: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Emotions</li> <li>• Accurate Self-Perception</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-Taking</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Respect for others</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> </ul>

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 has been an elementary principal for three years and has worked in education for 20 years. Participant 7 is at a school site with 9.2% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 7 shared the following:

As it applies to other students, discipline, motivation and impulse control are the three things that stand out with respect to African American kids, specifically men. I had a student that had a reputation for being impulsive and being dumb, always doing things and not having any self-control. The student was in the 2nd grade. I spoke to the student and I couldn't see what others were talking about. I wondered how many times had a teacher actually taken out time to find out about the student. The student, because of something that happened one year, had been labeled like this for the next few years. The student had fallen behind and he was treated differently as a result of the labeling.

I strategically placed his child in a certain classroom and provided the support to the teacher. By putting those things in place, the focus shifted for that particular student and for the teacher it became more toward goal setting for the student, not so much self-discipline and impulse control. It also became a matter of goal setting for that teacher. The transformation that you can see when a teacher puts on a different set of lenses when it comes to a child that has a reputation is an amazing difference.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 7 cited recognizing strengths, accurate self-perception, and self-confidence as strategies used to close the achievement gap. One of the reasons they do awards at the African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC) meetings is she doesn't believe African American students' strengths are ever recognized. Participant 7 also shared that one of the African American teachers on site reported they had never received an award until they were an adult.

Participant 7 shared, "When you recognize strengths in a student it has such an impact on them. Once you recognize those strengths and show them the possibilities they have with that, it changes their perception of themselves. I think it will directly connect to closing the achievement gap."

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 7 lists appreciating diversity as a strategy used to close the achievement gap and shared the following:

You have to be able to recognize the cultures that you deal with. You take a picture of your class. You're not going to see the same picture of every kid. It's the differences that you will see. We are trying to help them understand that their

differences do not mean less, especially for African American kids, your differences and what you have enhance who you are, then it enhances our society and our schools.

Students that have that sense of pride in their family and their culture and don't feel ashamed are going to be more apt to participate in school activities and to volunteer for things when asked.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 7 reports using relationship building and teamwork as strategies to close the achievement gap.

Teamwork with regard to teachers. I'm at one of the schools that has more African American teachers. The teamwork that they exhibit, especially to make sure that we are focusing on the achievement gap makes a huge difference, but, I would just say those two things in particular on that list I think are the ones that stand out for what we've done. (Participant 7)

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

As a leader, I'm not just going to say 'this is how I'm going to do it and this is my way.' I have to look at everything involved. So identifying what those problems

are not necessarily identifying problems that are with the student. It could be with the instructor, or something else. We look for things that we can use to solve those problems. Within that problem solving the ethical responsibility comes in. More happens when it comes to evaluating the effectiveness of ‘how did that work or what did that do?’ and then coming back to it. Then, the ethical decision making comes as a part of solving those problems. But we use all of those skills. Identifying problems because we're looking at solving the achievement gap for African American kids. (Participant 7)

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 7 stated: “I’m going to say self-efficacy because it comes down to the student. Everything we do, everything we put in, I’m hoping has an impact, but the self-efficacy of a student is very important.”

Table 9 Summarizes Participant 7s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 9

*Participant 7: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulse Control</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Self-Motivation</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing Strengths</li> <li>• Accurate Self-Perception</li> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> <li>• Perspective-Taking</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>

**Participant 8.** Participant 8 has been an elementary principal for seven years and has worked in education for 17 years. Participant 8 is at a school site with 11.6% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 8 stated,

For motivation, goal, setting, organizational, skills, those really come in the form of what frameworks do we have in place for students, so they can be successful.

For goal setting we have the teachers actually sit down and goal set with students.

They look at their actual assessments. Teachers tell the students you're here, but you really need to be here. Let's figure out some strategies to put in place for you and really, the onus is not on the teacher to tell the students how to do that.

The teacher is there to help the student understand how they can work towards their goal. The teacher may ask 'what things do you think we need to put in place for you to work towards this place?' If the student gets stuck, the teacher helps to support the student on what strategies they can use.

You talk about trauma infused teaching with the teachers and some kids grow up in trauma. That impulse control in that fight or flight system when teachers understand that they can help to bring down those stressors its very effective.

When those behaviors are triggered, teachers can help to bring that down in the classroom setting. You're also teaching them how to look at this impulse when this happens to them and how they can utilize self-control.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Being an African American principal and being a woman, kids can identify with you that you are African American, and I think that helps them to look at it. Same thing and one little girl told me I want to be just like you. I think it helped them to see that they can be in these differing roles. Like who they could possibly be, and then when they see that you're confident and they start to develop their confidence.

Also, the way that you encourage them so that they can continue to develop their strengths. You know, like they might be dancing, you're like 'ooh I like that dancer. My gosh I love your braids.' You know, somebody may not compliment kids on that, but it's the little things that you do and you say and the little things that maybe you don't pay attention to that helps develop their positive self-perception and confidence in the child. It also helped to identify their strengths.

(Participant 8)

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Just bringing other perspectives into the conversation is hugely important, especially when you're dealing with African American students. There is a story



that people always believe and it is not the case and so they begin to understand this differently. (Participant 8)

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 8 shared the following with regards to Research Question 4:

We have lunch on the lawn with our families. Two hundred families come and have lunch with their kids out there on the lawn. Great way to build that social engagement right with all of your parents. The teachers would then adopt the kids that didn't have a parent that was coming, and then take time to go sit on the lawn with the kids and then play games and just chat with them and then see what's going on so the kids didn't feel like they were out of the loop. The teachers are connecting with the families and then they're starting to see another side of the families we serve. Now we're building communication so when the child is acting up they're not so quick to think negatively, because they haven't built that connection now, they're like 'what's going on?' So, we have social engagement communication amongst the staff and then teamwork to really help build it all together and pull it all together because I can't just run this whole system by myself.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 8 stated,

Well this really is a whole piece in dealing with African Americans and the achievement gap. Last year we had a walkthrough and received an Equity Report. Huge, because they identified within that report some issues that we have to deal with. You can't just sweep them under the rug because of your ethical responsibility. You have to make these changes so that was my first step actually having to identify the problem. Next is reading the report to analyze what they've said and figure out 'where do I need to go from here?' Once we get those pieces going, we'll evaluate whether the pieces put in place have been successful.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 8 stated the following:

The one for me and I think it encompasses all of them, is ethical responsibility. Because I feel like everything falls underneath that when you feel like you have an ethical responsibility to take care of something, then you make sure that all of those other pieces get taken care of because at the end of the day, that's what needs to be done.

Table 10 Summarizes Participant 8s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 10

*Participant 8: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Motivation</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> <li>• Impulse Control</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> <li>• Accurate Self-Perception</li> <li>• Self-Confidence</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-taking</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Engagement</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> <li>• Identifying Problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> </ul>

**Participant 9.** Participant 9 has been an elementary principal for 12 years and has worked in education for 24 years. Participant 9 is at a school site with 13.5% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 9 shared the follow with regard to Research Question 1:

One of the ways to close the achievement gap is have the kids set goals and discuss those goals with their teachers. For reading we set up, did you meet your AR goal or did you meet your growth goal with AR and then at least once a week when I'm doing my morning announcements, I ask the kids 'how are you doing towards your goals when you see me on the playground?' See me in the cafeteria. Tell me about your goals. Are you close to meeting your goals? And we teach the kids how to make realistic goals, because even if you look at the teacher evaluation component of this, IT talks about goal setting with kids.

Some kids have never been taught social norms and this is how you socially do things. And so, when you look at the PBIS skills it is about self-discipline, self-control and learning how to. When things come at you, how to address them.

This is how I accept no. This is how I accept criticism. This is how I wait for my turn. We assume kids already get that coming to school. But a lot of kids don't.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 9 shared,

Self-efficacy is the one that I focus on the most because you have to believe that you can do something. You have to believe that you can set a goal and get there, and even if you don't make it to that goal, 'OK. How can I adjust and try it again?' And I think that's very important with closing the achievement gap. The teachers have to believe the kids can do it and then the kids have to believe they can do it

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 9 lists appreciating diversity as a strategy to close the achievement gap, and stated the following:

We have to be careful about what we say diversity is because I think sometimes we say this is a diverse school, and it's 95% Hispanic. That's not diverse. When you look at the achievement gap you look at the school population that you're working with. We're about 14% African American, about 14% White, 65% Hispanic and then we have a small group of kids that are Asian or Island Pacific. Appreciating what everybody contributes equates to appreciating diversity. During Black History Month you don't say 'we're doing this because they're Black.' No, we're doing this because this person did something great and contributed to our society.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 9 shared,

I think you close the achievement gap by showing kids that we appreciate who you are and what you bring to the table. Without feeling like I'm isolating you. I think it starts with the communication. And communication is not just what you say. It's what's at your school. What the kids are exposed to. We're teaching them grammar. We're teaching them reading. We're teaching them writing. But I think when you correct them, because they have a dialect or because they don't, they say 'ax' instead of 'ask.' I think you have to be very careful with that kind of thing, and I've felt this since the beginning when I started teaching.

And it's common at home, but when you're in school, you don't tell him you know you don't berate them for saying it, you just say 'when we're writing in school, we don't say ain't, we say aren't or we say it's not.' You show them the way that you say it in writing at school. When you berate them, you're berating their family. 'Because that's how my mother speaks. That's how my grandmother speaks. That's how my uncle speaks', and so you start with that perspective. Then you make sure kids feel like they are a part of the school.

You don't make a big deal out of certain things like hair. I remember this day clearly when I was in kindergarten. One day, I had an Afro because I wanted an Afro. I went into class. I'm not thinking no big deal of it. Sometimes my hair

was braided sometimes I had an Afro. After the teacher took role, she asked me to come to the front of the class, and to explain my new hairdo. So, making sure that when we do things that we again are not isolating kids. Don't touch their hair saying 'what do you call that?'

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 9 shared the following regarding Research Question 5:

I think reflecting is huge. You have to know what works and what didn't work.

This is the third school I've been a principal at. And at every school that I've been a principal at we've closed the gap, so there's no achievement gap between my student groups. Part of that is reflecting on our teaching and the materials we choose to use, and identifying why kids are not learning. Before I became a principal, I started with doing data conferences with people. We look at each kid. 'OK, what is happening here?' If it's an attendance problem, how can we help there? If we analyze our data and we say 'this group of kids is not answering this type of question or they're not responding to this type of intervention.' Then what are we going to put in place to solve that problem?

In the beginning it's really hard for teachers because they feel like you're attacking them. You're saying that I don't respond to this group of kids or I don't teach this and I don't teach that. But really, breaking down the data and saying 'OK, this is not working for this group of kids. What can we do to help them?' And not

giving blanket interventions. Even with something like after school tutoring.

‘What are we doing in that group? Who are the kids that are going to be in that group? What kind of support do they need?’ Even with my after-school tutoring, when you were talking about the solving of the problem, I pop into my after school tutoring groups, because I need to see what you're doing.

You have to ask the right questions of the teachers. ‘OK, so you're saying that this student can't read? My background is in reading. I have a masters in reading. I have a reading specialist credential.’ So, when you're telling me this kid can't read. ‘Did we go back and find out? What assessments did we do? What type of reading materials are you offering them? I know there's some that we have to do cause they're district, but when they're reading for pleasure, what does your classroom library look like?’ And we can't get around it by saying, ‘well, my books are all about animals.’ Identifying what the problem is. And it may be sometimes it's the teacher. Getting that teacher to think beyond just what they see in the mirror. You have to get them to think beyond that. Once you break it down, ‘OK, how are we going to address this now? How are we going to make sure that the kids in my classroom get what they need?’

One of the ways I've done it at a previous school site was we did rotations.

And so the first thing we did every morning was after we assessed our kids analyze who needed to be in what group. The first 30 minutes, the whole school rotated. And I would stand out in the quad to make sure it was happening. This teacher did the reading intervention. This teacher did the math intervention. This



teacher did enrichment for science or whatever. That rotation worked at that particular site.

When you really break things down, reflect on what you're teaching and your biases, so that you can identify the problem.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 9 stated,

I think building relationships with people. You hear that all the time. I think it's the most important, and I think it's the most difficult. Because when you build a relationship with people, you have to reveal who you really are. I try to do that with the students, the parent, and the people that work here. With most people you can get that positive relationship, that reciprocal relationship. There's going to be some that don't respond to it. But I think the relationship piece that you build with people is the most important, because even if they don't like you but they know that that you're being authentic with them and you could not like somebody, but respect what they do. That's stuck with me because you have to have a good follow through game. If you say you're going to do something, you have to do it.

If people need to know that they can depend on you I think the majority of people who work here and the parents and the kids know that they can depend on me. And even if they've done something wrong, the kids or whatever, they know I'm

not going to turn my back on them. Am I going to reprimand? Am I going to lecture them? But they know that I'm not out to harm them. They know that I'm trying to build them up. Building. The relationships in the community. I think that's the most important. Because even when you do mess up, if you have that relationship, they know that was one mistake. You can be forgiven and you can keep moving forward, but if you don't have that relationship piece, one mistake destroys everything.

Table 11 Summarizes Participant 9s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 11

*Participant 9: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Impulse control</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 11

*Participant 9: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

**Participant 10.** Participant 10 has been an elementary principal for 16 years and has worked in education for 30 years. Participant 10 is at a school site with 23% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 10 shared the following with regard to Research Question 1, The most important thing for any person, let alone African American principals to do to close achievement gaps, is to build relationships with kids and understand

that kids and families come from distinct backgrounds which may be challenging. So, the impulse control that I try to emulate and also implement at every site I've been at is to have my staff members, including teachers, classified staff, custodial staff, everyone understand that relationships are the most important thing and to have empathy for those kids who come through the door because they are going to come with a set of strategies and challenges that you may not be used to.

Impulse control is to control one's anger, and bias opinions about why children react the way they do.

For example, African American boys may say, 'oh man, I don't want to do that,' and that's just simply saying 'I have some challenges,' whereas someone who does not have any background for knowing African American children or relating to African children may take that as disrespect and anger. Once that person reacts negatively towards that child that relationship from there moving forward is going to be damaged. In order to build that trust back up, understanding the dynamics of impulse control from individuals is really important.

***Research question 2.*** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 10 cited recognizing strengths as a strategy for closing the achievement gap. Participant 10 shared the following,

African American kids come with talents that are not tapped into by nature. We are very animated people and we tend to use vocal skills in order to get things.

Many times, that tendency to speak up or to want to be heard, from the child's perspective is viewed as, being disrespectful from those who are technically in charge. If a kid comes and says 'hey, I want to do it, I want to do it.' The teacher says hold on, hold on and then waits five or 10 minutes before they call upon that kid. By that time that kid feels anger and isolated 'like see he never calls on me. That's why I don't want to participate.' So, understanding and tapping into those strengths that we come to the classroom with. That may not be in the area of reading, writing, math and those skills, but tapping into those individual skills that our kids do have, which brings a difference in classroom settings. That would be remarkable for closing achievement gap for our kids.

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 10 shared,

That right, the last means that respect for others. The paradigm of public education in general is the leader of that classroom, particularly the teacher, is our authoritative figure which comes from the perspective of like 'I'm in charge. It's my way or no way. If you don't want to agree with what my perception is, this is how we're going to do it. We're going to have some issues and concerns that cannot be met many times.'

I think teachers come from that perspective, like, 'I'm in charge, listen to me' and they don't want to take the opportunity to again listen to those vocal people or

those vocal animated children in the classroom who may not say ‘OK. I’m going to raise my hand and I want you to call upon me so we can dialogue later. I want to speak now.’ This is what’s happening to me, whereas the teacher again will see that as being disrespectful, defiant, calling out of turn not following the rules, and the list goes on and on and on work where that can be identified as being a problematic child when actually that child, just wants to be heard and to be seen and to be recognized. That’s a huge challenge that I think we face with people who don’t look like me ahead of our kids in terms of educating them.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 10 stated the following in regard to Research Question 4:

I want to focus on all those actually. We are not viewed as being intellectual when I say we, our kids. We are not viewed as being a contributor to the classroom as far as engagement. Many times, we are viewed as ‘I have to help this this child become XY and Z upper or achieve this proficiency level.’ So, in terms of communication, many times just simply understanding and asking that child what’s going on. ‘Hey, what’s up today? How you doing?’ and that can make a world of a difference.

In terms of just establishing a connection that’s outside the academic realm in terms of the engagement part, we don’t tend to gravitate or appreciate the diversity. If someone comes with a hairstyle that’s different, we don’t

acknowledge it. And many times, we want to be acknowledged for simple things. And when we are not acknowledged for those simple things again, that relationship is going to take on a whole new challenge.

That's going to take weeks, days, years to build, and by that time that child has suffered for that same period of time. Many times, when we have these theories, or we have these strategies, or we have these conference notes, or these people coming in, they're not coming in from a perspective from which our people, or my kids can relate to, so that avenue or that strategy that you may think is helpful is doing more damage. So just ask and our kids, we know what we need. And we know what we have to do so.

Just ask 'how can I help you? Where are you coming from? What challenges do you have' instead of assuming that this is going to help for this particular child is key.

I spoke about relationships a lot, you know, and relationship building is not just simply a relationship with that particular teacher, but there's a relationship for the entire staff. School settings and many principals can be egotistical and we think that we are the know it all. But I believe that everyone who steps into my campus has a valuable input or valuable contribution that they can make to a child, and I don't care if it's the person that delivers the milk. The custodian, the teacher, whomever they have some skills that they can help tap into our children and we have to, as administrators know what.

Let's say, little Gray needs to know what adult on that campus has that strength to help. Like they call it mentoring just informal mentoring. So, connecting the

skills that adults have with the needs of the kids at the relationship building part is key for the success of our people and our kids. Every kid is not for every adult, and every adult is not for every kid, but understanding that we have resources on our campus to help that child, that you may not have a connection with is what teamwork is all about. As the principal I must know who to go to for B and know which teacher I cannot go to for those particular things that I need for my kids to succeed. The teamwork comes in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of everyone on the campus for the betterment of those kids.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Research Question 5 was addressed by Participant 10 with the following, That's a deep question. It has a whole lot of components involved in it. I want to start with analyzing. Our system is really not designed to analyze problems. Our system is designed to just have kids achieve in certain areas and those areas are measured by standardized tests and those standardized tests are not the end all. As long as we're in that paradigm where we think that the student achievement is based upon standardized test scores, we're not going to have all of our kids achieve and succeed.

Analyzing the problems of a campus may not be in direct correlation with the goals and objectives of the Board the district. The site and so forth and many times the problems that do exist are deep rooted, systemic racist challenges that



exist. And so until we as administrators can understand that we have to play two different fields like my momma used to tell me, there's a school voice and there's a home voice.

Or there's a school way of doing things and there's a home way of doing things. And our kids are coming from their paradigm. I got a home way of doing this, but I have to navigate and change my paradigm to the school way of doing something. And I'm only a kid. I don't even understand all this.

The adult and many times it's it is that principal must understand that. Yet you have to dive into those different worlds. The efficacy that you spoke on, that's what's most important. That should drive the administrators to know that I have to do what's best for this kid to survive in this K12 system and not just this particular school year.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 10 shared the following:

I'm going back to the most important strategy which has two different elements. One is for that kid to be recognized as a human being. Next is recognizing that kid with a set of structures that that child is coming to our campus with and life skills, the other one is for the adults to tap into that child's background and understand that that child's background. So, I think relationship building is the most important.

Table 12 summarizes participant 10s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 12

*Participant 10: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulse Control</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing Strengths</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for Others</li> <li>• Perspective Taking</li> </ul>
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

**Participant 11.** Participant 11 has been an elementary principal for six years and has worked in education for 21 years. Participant 11 is at a school site with 14% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 11 stated:

One of the things we do as far as goal setting is that because we are an avid elementary school, everybody has a goal set for every six weeks of what they want to do and with our impulse control and self-esteem our goal building. We use our PBIS skills. We teach a lesson every day to teach students how to cope with the different mechanisms of what goes on through the day as far as impulse control to carry out that lesson.

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 11 stated the following for Research Question 2,

One of the ways we identify and close the achievement gap for African American students is before our year starts, we actually do data checks and we use our panoramic survey to recognize strengths. We map our gaps from the state testing and we identify where it is that these students are not being successful. So, for

instance, if I have one 3rd grader or one 4th grader who took the test last year as a third grader and we realized that when we looked at the panoramic survey, he didn't feel safe at school. He's not comfortable with being with teachers. Maybe that's why he didn't feel safe in the testing environment and didn't do well on the CAASP because he didn't feel as safe. So next time we create our testing environment we make sure that all students feel safe and welcome.

**Research question 3.** The third research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 11 stated,

The first thing I do as far as closing the achievement gap with respect to empathy is I make sure that my teachers understand what an empathetic educator is. An empathetic educator understands what social diversity is, what it takes to make sure that this student is learning, and all those tie in together. Once you're an empathetic educator, you understand the different diversities of the students.

Then you have an educational perspective that will make sure that all students are served well.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

In response to Research Question 4, Participant 11 stated the following:

Before you can even teach a student, you have to build a relationship with them, so it will be when school first starts, or when you're meeting a new set of students.

You have to set up routines and procedures and one of the things we do is make sure our students understand that we care about who they are and, what their interests are. We also set up ways to communicate with them. You need to understand what is their way of communication. You need to learn your student. Maybe you need to write to that student or email that student. You might allow that student to have time to come to you. What we tend to fall short in as educators is we put all students in one category.

You might figure the whole group of students are comfortable, let's say at a party, or having a dance or something. However, there are some students that don't enjoy that. They would rather draw right or they want to talk which goes to relationship building. You could have lunch with that student to build the relationship.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Participant 11 stated,

First of all, when we're working with our students, we have to know who our students are. We can't make assumptions that they're all the same, so one way that we do is in addition to doing data chats, we go through different tiers and

teachers are required to know what the needs of their students are. We actually sit down and because we do share students, sometimes we have these heart to heart conversations. We take our information that's in our computer system about behavior or other needs are. Then we analyze. 'How can we service this student? What is it that would best service this student? Do they need to be in our check in check out process? Do we need to do counselor referrals to them? Are they in that tier one group?' We come up with solutions and all solutions aren't the same. Our solutions are flexible and their fluid because as people change, kids change, so we have to look every three to four weeks and see what this student's needs are.

Do we need to keep working at their needs and do we move on? Then as far as teachers are concerned, we always have an ethical responsibility to ensure we're meeting the needs of students. It's our job to educate the whole child before we can teach him. We have to find out what's going on inside before we can teach him how to produce.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 11 cited relationship building as the most important strategy to close the achievement gap and stated the following,

If my students, and especially my African American students do not believe that you care you're not going to get any production from them.

That's extremely important once they realize that when you're correcting behavior you truly care for them and you're not being punitive, then you're going to get production. But just like with anything, all children have their guards up, and if all you do is push, push, push and correct, correct, correct and you never praise and you never say 'this is OK and we can think of better ways' and everything is always a consequence and never reward, then you're not gonna build any type of relationship with students.

I'll tell you, as an African American student once myself and as a mother of African American children, if you don't have a relationship with kids, then they're not gonna trust you. They're just not. And once you build the relationship, you can get the best from them.

Table 13 summarizes Participant 11's responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 13

*Participant 11: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulse control</li> <li>• Goal setting</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying emotions</li> <li>• Recognizing strengths</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating diversity</li> <li>• Perspective taking</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 13

*Participant 11: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying problems</li> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

**Participant 12.** Participant 12 has been an elementary principal for eight years and has worked in education for 28 years. Participant 12 is at a school site with 12.2% population of African American students.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

Participant 12 shared the following in response to Research Question 1, The ones I use most often are stress control, self-discipline, goal setting and organizational skills. The stress control example is each week in my message to the staff I include two or three videos that are about a minute or two long and they're from our SAP, which is our student assistance or SAP counselor. This week one was on stress release. One was on kind of goal setting and one was on



change. Kids are about to promote to the next level and some are leaving our schools. So we added the changed one just to give kids. Some practice envisioning what the next step is going to be, and not getting too stressed. So, for that one we're also an avid school, which it's the advancement via individual determination, and so for that one, the organization and the goal setting. Fits in we are TK 6 so we set goals at the beginning of the year and then revisit those throughout the year and then we also teach our kids different ways to organize themselves.

Whole class take generally through two, but then it gradually translates into the note taking and things like that. The AVID strategies as they move up the grade levels.

And then I put this self-discipline just as we are constantly. Messaging and teaching our students how to self-monitor themselves. What they think. What they say, what they do and the difference between how we conduct ourselves at home or in the neighborhood, and how we conduct ourselves in the workplace. Which I believe school is.

***Research question 2.*** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

Participant 12 shared the following in response to Research Question 2:  
In listening to those, I think the three that kind of jump out are the one on identifying emotions, recognizing strengths, and self-efficacy.

On identifying emotions, one of the things that we work with, our kids with is in kind of a restorative circle process, is being able to understand when they're happy or sad or mad.

Angry or fearful and understanding that they have control over those emotions.

The emotions don't control us. We do that through restorative practices or circle time in our classrooms. For recognizing strengths all of us are strengths change, trained and our 5th and our 6th graders also participate in the strength curriculum, which is a little different than the adult training. It's not so much strength, it's more character and talents. They call it because it may change from 5th grade to 9th to seniors. So we as a staff know, our strengths and how we work together and support each other, but in particular our 5th and 6th graders learn their kind of talents and how those talents manifest themselves in relationships and their work and how they can grow and develop them. And then the last one is self-efficacy. One of the things my assistant principal and all of us teachers is we really want our kids to learn to develop self-efficacy for themselves. We encourage our kids to question things and to problem solve with us what we try and teach them is the way to do that. We want them to when things don't seem fair or they don't seem right, or they just question it. We want them to say something and not necessarily just go with the status quo. We believe that we're teaching our kids how to be thinkers, and so as they grow and develop, we want them thinking and not just following.

**Research question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

Participant 12 stated,

The two that jump out kind of with me is the appreciating diversity and respect for others we have at our site. Our site has an equity goal based upon the students and the population and the community we serve. Our equity goal this year really was to build our understanding of other cultures and the biases that we might bring so that we can widen our lens and widen the lens of students. We did that through read-alouds through and identifying read-alouds that represented all of our kids, their cultures, their religions, their backgrounds. The read-alouds were very inclusive gender wise, but also inclusive of our students with disabilities. The whole purpose was not only to build our understanding as we went through the books and identified the key learning, and where we would stop to ask questions and key vocabulary, but in building our knowledge now we can widen the lens that we teach from.

All of our kids are goals. All of our kids see themselves in the books that we read, and the things that we do, and the things that we celebrate and the whole purpose of that was to build empathy for ourselves, but empathy for others and their stories. The purpose is to appreciate others and see our commonalities.

**Research question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

Participant 12 shared the following regarding Research Question 4:

First it would be relationship building and that is kind of an overarching theme for the adults. We are constantly building relationships with our kids and our families with each other. Everything we do rests on that foundation of the relationship, and whether we're successful or non-successful often rests on the foundation of that relationship. That's why the first thing is building relationships.

The second thing is communication. Mission. It is not only communication from the adult to child and how we do that in a respectful way, and in a way that builds our students ability to communicate. It's also teaching our children how to communicate with each other to communicate with adults and how to communicate in the workplace.

We also teach how that communication may be different than how we communicate in our homes as well as when we're at the park playing and the last one is teamwork.

Kids come to school with a real sense of their family as kind of a unit united but helping. Kids understand that in the workplace it's teamwork that gets things done, and so in school helping them really learn how to work together and how to negotiate and how to have a back and forth conversation. How to hear others is something we work on constantly, because ultimately when they get a job, they're much more likely to have a job in which they have to work with a group of people to produce a product versus working on their own and working in isolation so teamwork is something we message in all that we do, and we try and model

teamwork in all that we do. We teach about how a team gets along, but also how a team, responds when a member does something that they don't like that preserves the integrity of the team.

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

Sharing their thoughts on Research Question 5, Participant 12 shared the following:

I would say all of those are important, especially when you take the time with students to teach them the process of analyzing problems. Often it's a social problem between students, but really taking a look at helping them see others perspective, helping them kind of take apart the problem. Next, we guide them to a solution that both can live with, so to speak, and that's equitable. To me, that's hugely important that our kids leave here knowing how to problem solve when there's a problem, not run from it, not get and not get aggressive in response to it. Students need to really analyze the problem and be able to take ownership when they contribute it to it. That's not weakness, that's growth. Another way that we try and do that here is school wide with our student leaders, who are 5th and 6th graders and my site. We have leadership teams of kids and they give us input on things that we're thinking about. They bring us problems that we maybe didn't know about.

And they deliver the message to other students. For example, when we came back to on site instruction, we took it to our leadership team students how the recess was going to look very different than before.

We delivered that message to staff, and to parents, but we had our leaders go room to room virtually and deliver it to the kids. The kids were able to talk about it, practice it, they were able to ask their questions and say what they thought kids might think. We have found if the kids deliver the message, then it's much more successful.

After they deliver the message the kids come back to us. If there are problems going forward and someone is not honoring what they're supposed to be doing, they bring it to the leadership at the student leader meeting, and then we talk about it and what we need to do to fix this. They take ownership of it. It's not just adults making decisions about what kids can and cannot do.

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

Participant 12 shared the following:

The most important for me is relationship building. It's the foundation of the work that we do. My ability to build relationships with my staff helps us advance our mission and vision. Without those relationships, work gets done, but not at the pace that it needs to get done and not with the urgency that it needs to get done. In the same way we're building relationships with kids and building

relationships with families. Kids won't work for people that they don't think believe in them. Parents will push back without a relationship. The parent relationship helps you get the most out of a parent and get their support for their child in your school.

The relationships with your students, your parent community, and with your staff builds everything else. It's really hard to build anything else if you don't have a relationship. The trust it's like the soil. It lets everything grow. And without it, things will grow, but not at the depth and not to the depth and the level that they will and would if you were constantly nurturing those relationships.

Table 14 summarizes participant 12s responses in themes and patterns related to closing the achievement gap for African American students.

Table 14

*Participant 12: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
1	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress Management</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> </ul>
2	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying emotions</li> <li>• Recognizing Strengths</li> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>
3	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> <li>• Respect for Others</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 14

*Participant 12: Themes in Response to Research Questions*

	Research Question	Themes in Responses
4	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul>
5	What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing Situations</li> <li>• Solving Problems</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> </ul>
6	What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

**Data Analysis by Common Themes in Research Questions**

The following sections present an analysis of the most common themes based on all participant data and responses to each research question.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?* Once all data was collected and coded the participants' responses were analyzed collectively for common themes.

**Common theme 1: Goal setting.** Nine of the 12 participants, 75%, cited goal setting as a strategy used with African American students to close the achievement gap.



When I'm working with students and working with teachers specifically in the area of goal setting and organization, what's important to stress is students understanding and having the ability to interpret their own data test data. So, they know the benchmarks and what they need to do to go to move forward. What I encourage my teachers to do is at the beginning of the year when we sit together and or and they sit together with their students, they look at that initial benchmark data as they are having conferences with their students related to where they are currently performing. (Participant 5)

***Common theme 2: Impulse control.*** Six of the 12 participants, 50% cited impulse control as a strategy used to close the achievement gap.

I had a student that had a reputation for being impulsive and being dumb, always doing things and not having any self-control. The student was in the 2nd grade. I spoke to the student and I couldn't see what others were talking about. I wondered how many times had a teacher actually taken out time to find out about the student. The student, because of something that happened one year, had been labeled like this for the next few years. The student had fallen behind and he was treated differently as a result of the labeling.

I strategically placed this child in a certain classroom and provided the support to the teacher. By putting those things in place, the focus shifted for that particular student and for the teacher it became more toward goal setting for the student, not so much self-discipline and impulse control. (Participant 8)

Table 15 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 1.

Table 15

*Common Themes*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Goal Setting	9	-
Impulse Control	6	-
Stress management	2	-
Self-Discipline	6	-
Self-Motivation	3	-
Organizational Skills	5	-

**Research Question 2.** The second research question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?"* The researcher analyzed the data, and common themes emerged from their response.

**Common theme 1: Identifying emotions.** Seven of the 12 participants, 58%, shared the strategy of identifying emotions was used as a strategy to close the achievement gap.

On identifying emotions, one of the things that we work with, our kids with is in kind of a restorative circle process, is being able to understand when they're happy or sad or mad. Angry or fearful and understanding that they have control over those emotions. The emotions don't control us. We do that through restorative practices or circle time in our classrooms. (Participant 12)

**Common theme 2: Recognizing strengths.** Six of the 12 participants, 50%, shared the strategy of recognizing strengths to close the achievement gap. Participant 7 cited recognizing strengths, accurate self-perception and self-confidence as strategies used to close the achievement gap. One of the reasons they do awards at the AAPAC meetings is

she doesn't believe African American students' strengths are ever recognized. Participant 7 also shared that one of the African American teachers on site reported they had never received an award until they were an adult.

When you recognize strengths in a student it has such an impact on them. Once you recognize those strengths and show them the possibilities they have with that, it changes their perception of themselves. I think it will directly connect to closing the achievement gap.

Table 16 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 2.

Table 16

*Common Themes for Research Question 2*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Identifying Emotions	7	-
Accurate Self-Perception	6	-
Recognizing Strengths	6	-
Self-Confidence	5	-
Self-Efficacy	2	-

**Research Question 3.** The third question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?* The researcher analyzed the data, and common themes from their responses.

**Common theme 1: Perspective-taking.** Nine of the 12 participants, 75%, cited using perspective-taking as a strategy to close the achievement gap. Participant 1 cited the strategy of perception in the context of teachers having a perspective of how students should behave. When students didn't behave in that particular way that matched their

perspective-taking then, “they viewed the students as throw away kids” (Participant 1). This resulted in Participant 1 having to build the capacity of the staff to understand what students were dealing with on a day to day basis. Time had to be spent defining what trauma informed practice was and knowledge of unconscious bias.

**Common theme 2: Appreciating diversity.** Seven of the 12 participants, 58%, shared utilizing the strategy of appreciating diversity to close the achievement gap.

I think the most important strategy as it relates to closing the gap with our African American students would be appreciating diversity, and honoring who my kiddos and parents are as African American parents. Respecting that. Recognizing and honoring that diversity and that it is OK. It may look different, but it's OK. And to understand that diversity, because then that's going to impact how you interact with that student, how you interact with his or her mom, his or her dad, or, whatever the family unit may be. But really? Really appreciating the diversity because in the climate that we're in now, our students don't feel that. They don't feel like who they are, is recognized, appreciated, or valued. (Participant 6)

Table 17 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 3.

Table 17

*Common Themes for Research Question 3*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Perspective-Taking	9	-
Empathy	5	-
Appreciating Diversity	7	-
Respect for Others	7	-

**Research Question 4.** The fourth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the*

*achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?”* The researcher analyzed the data, and common themes emerged from their response.

***Common theme 1: Relationship building.*** Ten of the 12 participants cited relationship building as a strategy to close the achievement gap. Participant 2 notes she uses relationship building to close the achievement gap. She describes how her high visibility allows her to build relationships with families. One way she does that is by attending IEP and 504 meetings. Attending those meetings allows her to ensure that she knows the stories of the families, so when she does have to discipline, she has some context. Another reason she provides for attending IEP and 504 meetings is due to, “The fast tracking that occurs when they have, maladaptive behaviors in a class. It’s important to understand ‘is this a behavior issue or is this an academic issue?’” (Participant 2).

***Common theme 2: Communication.*** Eight of the 12 participants cited using communication as a strategy to close the achievement gap. “Communication is not just verbal so we have literally a professional development around what is communication and what does it look like and what are the messages that I'm sending to other people” (Participant 1). Participant 1 notes that teaching about communication, “was like you have to literally take the things that students are doing and not look at it like they're trying to be defiant, but that they're trying to communicate it in a way that's not acceptable.”

Table 18 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 4.

Table 18

*Common Themes for Research Question 4*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Communication	8	-
Social Engagement	7	-
Relationship Building	10	-
Teamwork	6	-

**Research question 5.** The fifth question was: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?"* The researcher analyzed the data, and common themes emerged from their response.

**Common theme 1: Analyzing situations.** Twelve of the 12 participants shared they use the strategy of analyzing situations to close the achievement gap.

Participant 1 cited three strategies used to close the achievement gap in this area including identifying problems, analyzing situations and solving problems. Participant 1 detailed how restorative circles are used by stating,

So, a teacher has a restorative justice circle because there's students in the classroom that are picking on each other. They get in a circle. They're discussing what the problem is. Why is this happening? They're analyzing it. They're going through all of those steps, because to me those are steps of problem solving and they're going through that to restore a positive climate in that classroom.

**Common theme 2. Identifying problems.** Nine of 12 participants shared they used the strategy of identifying problems to close the achievement gap.

Participant 3 listed (a) identifying problems as a strategy used to close the achievement gap. Participant 3 stated the following:

For example, in one of my classrooms the teacher has like a problem box and I know it sounds very elementary, no pun intended. But if there was some sort of conflict or something throughout the day that students write it down and they put it in the box and before they leave, part of their exit ticket is to circle up again and to talk about it. The class talks about and it's anonymous. The class kind of works through the problem of how this person could have solved this situation, and I mean, that's just one example that comes to mind.

Table 19 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 5.

Table 19

*Common Themes for Research Question 5*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Identifying Problems	9	-
Analyzing Situations	12	-
Solving Problems	8	-
Evaluating	4	-
Reflecting	5	-
Ethical Responsibility	5	-

**Research question 6.** The sixth research question was: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?* The researcher analyzed the data, and common themes emerged from their response.

***Common Theme 1. Relationship building.*** Five of 12 participants, 42%, identified relationship building as the most important strategy used to close the achievement gap.

The most important for me is relationship building. It's the foundation of the work that we do.

My ability to build relationships with my staff helps us advance our mission and vision. Without those relationships, work gets done, but not at the pace that it needs to get done and not with the urgency that it needs to get done. In the same way we're building relationships with kids and building relationships with families. Kids won't work for people that they don't think believe in them.

Parents will push back without a relationship. The parent relationship helps you get the most out of a parent and get their support for their child in your school.

The relationships with your students, your parent community, and with your staff builds everything else. It's really hard to build anything else if you don't have a relationship. The trust it's like the soil. It lets everything grow. And without it, things will grow, but not at the depth and not to the depth and the level that they will and would if you were constantly nurturing those relationships. (Participant 12)

***Common Theme 2. Self-confidence.*** Two of 12 participants identified self-confidence as the most important strategy used to close the achievement gap.

Participant 1 cited self-confidence as the most important strategy, and stated the following:



If you can get a student or you can get any person to realize that they are the ones that are in control of their destiny, that they alone not who they were born to, not which teacher did they get, not how much money do they have, not how many. None of that, none of that is the determining factor in the end. If you could get them to realize that, you have struck gold.

Table 20 delineates the common themes addressing Research Question 6.

Table 20

*Common Themes for Research Question 6*

Theme	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Responses
Self Confidence	2	-
Relationship Building	5	-
Communication	1	-
Ethical Responsibility	2	-
Appreciating Diversity	1	-
Self-Efficacy	1	-

This chapter presented a summary of responses and experiences collected from 12 study participants. Each participant responded to a set of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions designed to describe strategies used by African American elementary principals to close the achievement gap.

The participants were African American TK-6 elementary principals from Moreno Valley Unified School District and Riverside Unified School Districts, in southern California. Once participants agreed to participate in this study, the researcher scheduled individual appointments to conduct the interview via zoom. All interviews were recorded using the Zoom application.

Once all interviews were done, all data collected was transcribed and then analyzed. The researcher analyzed all the coded data and identified common themes among participants' responses. Each transcript was analyzed individually to gather themes. Once all interviews were analyzed, the researcher combed all data to find common themes.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the study. It begins with a summary of the purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. The researcher discusses major findings of the study, including unexpected findings as well as conclusions drawn from the data analysis. Finally, implications for research are discussed as well as recommendations for future research and concluding remarks and reflections.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study researches the strategies African American principals implement to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students. Moreover, the study also revealed the strategy African American principals considered to be the most important to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American elementary school principals (Grades TK-6) in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL SEL core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. An additional purpose of the study was to understand the strategies within CASEL core competencies perceived as most important by African American elementary school principals in these counties.

## **Central Research Questions**

This phenomenological study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do African American elementary school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making?
2. What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

Six research questions were developed to help answer the main research questions.

1. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?
2. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?

3. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?
4. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?
5. What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?
6. Which of the best practices implemented within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by African American elementary school principals?

### **Research Methods**

This qualitative study used semi-structured open-ended interview questions to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American principals to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.

## **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was the 2,131 African American school principals in California in Riverside County. The strategy employed to identify the participants was criterion sampling based on the research problem, purpose, and questions. The criterion sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria (Patton, 2014). The following criteria were established to select eligible participants for this study:

- School Principal of African American race.
- School Principal of a school that serves 7% or more African American students.
- School Principal for a minimum of three years.
- School Principal that has received district, county, or other recognition for outstanding service as a principal.

In addition, the convenience sampling strategy allows a qualitative researcher to establish an accessible sample based on location and time (Marshall, 1996; Patton 2014). In this study, the convenience sampling strategy was simultaneously applied with the purposeful sampling strategy to identify participants who met the criteria and were conveniently accessible to the researcher (Marshall, 1996; Patton 2014).

The researcher contacted 16 potential participants individually and invited them to participate in the study. Twelve of the participants confirmed and set up an interview data and time. The remaining four participants did not respond; therefore, an official interview did not take place. The research included nine principals from Moreno Valley

and three principals from Riverside Unified School districts in southern California for a total of 12 participants.

### **Major Findings**

Chapter I introduced the research questions. The data collected from the 12 participants proved that African American TK-6 Principals use a variety of strategies to close the achievement gap. Of the strategies used by African American TK-6 Principals (a) goal setting, (b) perspective-taking, (c) relationship building, and (d) analyzing situation are among the strategies most utilized. The major findings of this study are organized by research question.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 sought to answer: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-management?*

**Major finding.** The major finding was 75% of the participants reported goal setting as a strategy used with African American students to close the achievement gap.

#### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 sought to answer: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of self-awareness?*

**Major finding.** The most significant finding was identifying emotions with 58% of participants reported it as important.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 sought to answer: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of social awareness?*

**Major finding.** Seventy-five percent of participants reported perspective-taking as a strategy used to close the achievement gap.

### **Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 sought to answer: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of relationship skills?*

**Major finding.** Eighty-three percent of participants reported using relationship building as a strategy to close the achievement gap

### **Research Question 5**

Research Question 5 sought to answer: *What strategies do African American elementary school principals use with African American students to close the achievement gap based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competency of responsible decision making?*

**Major finding 1.** One hundred percent of participants reported using analyzing situations as a strategy to close the achievement gap.

**Major finding 2.** Seventy-five percent of participants reported using identifying problems as a strategy to close the achievement gap.



## **Research Question 6**

Research Question 6 sought to answer: *What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?*

**Major finding.** The most significant finding was relationship building with 42% of the participants identifying it as important.

### **Unexpected Findings**

The data collected illustrated strategies utilized by African American TK-6 Elementary Principals to close the achievement gap. An unexpected finding was there was only one strategy that 100% of all African American TK-6 principals used and that was analyzing situations. The next highest rating reported was 83% of all African American TK-6 principals reported using relationship building as a strategy to close the achievement gap.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

After analyzing the major findings from the data, the researcher drew conclusions from the responses to the research questions. The conclusions listed address each research question or, in some cases, conclusions address combined findings.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The findings of the study indicate that recommended strategies fall into two categories: concrete organizational strategies such as goal setting, identifying problems and analyzing problems; and interpersonal strategies such as identifying emotions, perspective taking, and relationship building. From these findings it can be concluded

that from the perspective of African American principals, it is a combination of concrete organizational strategies and interpersonal strategies that combine to make an effective overall strategy when working with African American students. Neither approach alone addresses the overall needs of students if they are to be successful academically.

Interpersonal needs must be met to get students to buy in and commit to the idea of success and personal organizational needs must be implemented to give them the tools they need to implement success. Both are important and must be implemented together.

### **Overall Recommendation**

Based upon the overall conclusion, it is recommended that principals and school staff be made aware of the information in this study and that they be trained in both strategies to connect personally with students and strategies to give students appropriate organizational tools. Following such training, it is imperative that principals and staff spend time thinking about and planning for each student and the overall groups of students they are working with to plan the best ways to implement the combined interpersonal and organizational tools. Solutions and approaches may very well be different depending on the individual or the group.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

There are many studies that focus on the achievement gap, and it is recommended that further studies focusing on African American principal's perspectives be conducted. It is recommended that a study be conducted that identifies and describes the best approaches for implementing combined inter-personal and organizational training for students. A phenomenological study using open ended questions as opposed to the

restrictions of pre-determined variables would also illicit results more specific to the principal's best practices and commonalities.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The findings made it difficult to segregate the individual components of the research questions and instead led to one overall conclusion and recommendation. Based on the findings that, from the perspective of African American principals, it is a combination of concrete organizational strategies and interpersonal strategies that combine to make an effective overall strategy when working with African American students, further research into programs that combine both elements is needed. The literature revealed many programs that have been implemented in an attempt to close the achievement gap that exists for students of color and while strides were made over the years the gap continues to widen.

The failure to close the achievement gap reinforces the major finding that a program alone is not enough. Only through best practice and meeting the students' interpersonal needs joined with teaching the organizational skills students need will the gap be narrowed and eventually closed. Practitioners must take the time to get to know the whole child and from there proceed to focus on concrete organizational strategies. The African American TK-6 principals all expressed passion and zeal regarding working with African American students, yet their approaches varied. However, it is important to note that all of the African American TK-6 principals felt very positive about African American student's ability to be successful.

## **Recommendations for Action**

School districts need to implement the following actions to implement the finding of this study:

- A review and modification of the interview process used by school districts, and all other agencies, to ensure that minority candidates are not placed at a disadvantage by the content, cultural structure and implementation of the interview process.
- A review and modification of the communication process used by school districts, and all other agencies, to insure that minority students and parents are not placed at a disadvantage by the content, cultural structure and implementation of the communication process.
- A continued effort to recruit, train, and maintain high quality minority candidates for the teaching profession and for leadership positions within it to serve as role models for minority students.
- Implementation of the recommendations of the Blueprint for Action developed by the Riverside County African American Achievement Initiative recommendations for understanding and improving academic achievement for African American students.
- The use of groups such as Village Nation to promote African American understanding and success at the secondary level.

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## APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

## Synthesis Matrix

References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American	Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Analysis	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Ainsworth, L. (2011). <i>Rigorous curriculum design: How to create curricular units of study that align standards, instruction, and assessment</i> . Lead+ Learn Press.	X																					
Aminsh, R. J., & Asl, H. D. (2015). Review of constructivism and social constructivism. <i>Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages</i> , 1 (1), 9-16.	X																					
Anderson, S., Medrich, E., & Fowler, D. (2007). Which achievement gap? <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i> , 88 (7), 547-550.	X																					
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Arendale, D. R. (1994). Understanding the supplemental instruction model. In: Jossey-Bass.																						
Bada, S. O., & Olusegun, S. (2015). Constructivism learning theory: A paradigm for teaching and learning. <i>Journal of Research &amp; Method in Education</i> , 5 (6), 66-70.	X																				X	
Barton, P. E. (2005). Achievement Gaps: Past and Present. <i>Special section</i> , 34 (4), 12-44.	X																					
Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2010). The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped. Policy Information Report. <i>Educational Testing Service</i> .	X																					
Barton, P. E. (2003). Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress. Policy Information Report.	X						X				X											



References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Analysis	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Benner, G. J., Kutash, K., Nelson, J. R., & Fisher, M. B. (2013). Closing the achievement gap of youth with emotional and behavioral disorders through multi-tiered systems of support. <i>Education and Treatment of Children, 36</i> (3), 15-29.	X																				
Bowman, B. T., Comer, James and Johns, David. (2018). Addressing the African American Achievement Gap. <i>YC: Young Children, 75</i> (2), 14-23.	X																				
Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. <i>The Urban Review, 37</i> (5), 425-446.	X														X	X					
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Brooks, A. E. (2017). A Study of Lived Experiences of African American Male Principals in Urban Elementary Schools.	X													X							
Brown, F. (2005). African Americans and school leadership: An introduction. <i>Educational Administration Quarterly, 41</i> (4), 585-590.	X													X							
Brown, L. H., & Beckett, K. S. (2007). Building Community in an Urban School District: A Case Study of African American Educational Leadership. <i>School Community Journal, 17</i> (1), 7-32.	X													X							

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	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Analytic Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Bullough, R. V., Hall-Kenyon, K. M., & MacKay, K. L. (2012). Head Start teacher well-being: Implications for policy and practice. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , 40(6), 323-331.	x				x															
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	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Analytic	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Ferguson, R., Stellar, A., Schools, B. C. P., & Morganton, N. (2010). Toward excellence with equity: An emerging vision for closing the achievement gap. <i>Evidence-based Practice Articles</i> , 5(6).	X					X															
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Marcotte, D. E., & Hansen, B. (2010). Time for school. <i>Education Next, 10</i> (1), 52-59.	X																				
Margolis, H., & McCabe, P. P. (2006). Improving self-efficacy and motivation: What to do, what to say. <i>Intervention in School and Clinics, 41</i> (4), 218-227.	X																				
McCloskey, R. S. (2010). George Bush and No Child Left Behind: A Federalist Perspective. <i>Inquiries Journal, 2</i> (06).	X			X																	
McCormick, M. P., Cappella, E., O'Connor, E. E., & McClowry, S. G. (2015). Social-emotional learning and academic achievement: using causal methods to explore classroom-level mechanisms. <i>Aera Open, 1</i> (3), 2332858415603959.	X														X						
McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry, MjEducationLab Series.	X						X														

References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American	Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Theoretical	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (2006). Toward a critical race theory of education. <i>Critical race theory in education: All God's children get a song</i> , 11, 30.	X																X					
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Marcotte, D. E., & Hansen, B. (2010). Time for school. <i>Education News</i> , 10 (1), 52-53.	X																					
Margolis, H., & McCabe, P. P. (2006). Improving self-efficacy and motivation: What to do, what to say. <i>Intervention in School and Clinic</i> , 41 (4), 218-227.	X																					
McCloskey, R. S. (2010). George Bush and No Child Left Behind: A Federalist Perspective. <i>Inquiries Journal</i> , 2 (06).	X			X																		
McCormick, M. P., Cappella, E., O'Connor, E. E., & McClowry, S. G. (2015). Social-emotional learning and academic achievement: using causal methods to explore classroom-level mechanisms. <i>Open Access Journal of Business</i> , 1 (3), 2332858415603959.	X															X						
McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry, MEdEducationLab Series.	X						X															

References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems Theoretical	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Miller, D. I. (2019). When Do Growth Mindset Interventions Work? <i>Trends in cognitive sciences</i> , 22(11), 910-912.	X																	X			
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References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Headstart	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Extended-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Rattan, A., Savani, K., Chugh, D., & Dweck, C. S. (2016). Leveraging mindsets to promote academic achievement: Policy recommendations. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science, 11</i> (6), 721-726.	X																	X			
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References	Achievement Gap	Historical Perspective: The Coleman Report	Historical Perspective: ESEA	Historical Perspective: NCLB	Historical Perspective: Improving Handout	Historical Perspective: ESSA	Strategies: Evidence-Based Instruction	Strategies: Rigorous Curriculum	Strategies: Increased Instructional Time	Strategies: Supplemental Instruction	Strategies: Motivating and Engaging Students	Strategies: Links Between School and Home	Principal's Perspective	African American	Principal's Perspective	Social Emotional Learning	Theoretical Foundation: Critical Race Theory	Theoretical Foundation: Systems	Theoretical Foundation: Growth Mindset	Theoretical Foundation: Constructivism	Theoretical Framework: CASEL	Literature Gap
Thomas, J. Y., & Brady, K. P. (2005). Chapter 3: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act at 40: Equity, accountability, and the evolving federal role in public education. <i>Review of Research in Education, 29</i> (1), 51-67.	X		X																			
Thomas, P. L. (2011). Why the Achievement Gap Matters and Will Remain.	X																					
Tipton, F. B. (2008). Head Start update 2008: Overview of head start reauthorization. In.	X				X																	
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Zorn, J. (2018). Critical Race Theory in Education: Where Farce Meets Tragedy. <i>Academic Questions, 31</i> (2), 203-211. doi:10.1007/s12129-018-9699-z	X																X					

## APPENDIX B

### Letter of Invitation

**Study:** African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American Student Achievement Gap

March 29, 2021

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative methods research study about the strategies used by African American K-6 Principals to close the achievement gap. The main investigator of this study is Lisa C. Broomfield, Doctoral Candidate in UMass Global Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study, because you are identified as an African American K-6 Principal.

Approximately three public school districts located in Riverside County were targeted (Moreno Valley, Riverside, and Val Verde) for this study. The three districts have a combined total of 58 African American TK-12 principals. Approximately 15 K-6 African American principals will take part in the study. Participation should require about one hour of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

**PURPOSE:** This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at UMass Global. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to identify and describe strategies used by K-6 African American principals to close the achievement gap.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share your experience as a K-6 African American principal. The interview session will be audio recorded and transcribed.

**RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS:** There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could find alternative strategies for schools to use in closing the achievement gap. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

**ANONYMITY:** Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at [redacted]. You can also contact Dr. Phil Pendley by email at [pendley@umassglobal.edu](mailto:pendley@umassglobal.edu). If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Warm Regards,

Lisa C. Broomfield  
Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** Strategies used by K-6 African American principals to close the achievement gap.

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Lisa C. Broomfield, Doctoral Candidate

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at USMass Global. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to identify and describe the strategies implemented by African American K-6 school principals in Riverside County to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making.

In participating in this research study, I agree to partake in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview. The interview will take place in person at a school site or by phone, and lasts about an hour. During the interview, I will be asking a series of questions designed to allow me to gain the experiences of a K-6 African American principal.

I understand that:

- a) The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at a school site or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience.
- b) I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to determine effective strategies to close the achievement gap. The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.
- c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Lisa C. Broomfield, UMass Global Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mrs. Broomfield may be contacted by email at [redacted].
- d) I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
- e) The study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of two years by the investigator in a secure location.

- f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

UMass Global IRB December 2020

APPENDIX D

**Audio/Zoom Release Form**

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: African American Elementary School Principals' Perspectives of the African American Student Achievement Gap

**UMass Global  
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD  
IRVINE, CA 92618**

I authorize Lisa C. Broomfield, UMass Global Doctoral Candidate, to record my interview via Zoom. I give UMass Global and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the Zoom recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

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Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

---

Date

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Questions/Protocol Instrument (S)

**Interviewer:** Lisa C. Broomfield

**Interview time planned:** Approximately one hour

**Recording:** Digital/Zoom Recording

**Written:** Field and observational notes

**Introductions:** Introduce ourselves to one another.

**Opening Statement:** Thank you for agreeing to spend some time with me today. My name is Lisa C. Broomfield and I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global in the area of Organizational Leadership. I am a former continuation school principal and worked for [redacted] in that role for two years. I now work at the district office as the [redacted] for [redacted].

Given the changing landscape of public K-6 education, it is important to understand factors that may eliminate the achievement gap. Additionally, considering that public K-6 schools are facing high rates of principal turnover, it is important to deepen our understanding of why some principals are more successful at closing the achievement gap than others. As a former principal, I was curious about the perspectives of African American K-6 principals in closing the achievement gap. This led me to this research in exploring the impact of social emotional learning on the achievement gap.

**Interview Agenda:** I anticipate that this interview will take about one hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via email. Additionally, you signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for this study. You also read the Letter of Invitation and the Participant's Bill of Rights. Thank you for signing the Audio Release Form in advance of this interview. Next, I will begin the audio recorder and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. First, I will ask if you agree to voluntarily participate in this interview. Assuming you do, we will proceed. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcript to check for accuracy prior to the data being to data analysis. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the interview? I will be conducting approximately 10 - 15 interviews with others like yourself who are African American K-6 Principals. To ensure the data collected is pure, I may not engage in a lot of dialogue with you during the interview.

**Background Questions:**

1. How long have you been in the field of education?
2. How long have you served as a principal throughout your career?
3. How long have you served as principal at your current site?

**Content Question: CASEL Core Competency of Self-Management**

1. How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of self-management with respect to:
  - Impulse control
  - Stress management
  - Self-discipline
  - Self-motivation
  - Goal setting
  - Organization skills

Probe: Can you give me an example?

**Content Question: CASEL Core Competency of Self-Awareness**

2. How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of self-awareness with respect to:
  - Identifying emotions
  - Accurate self-perception
  - Recognizing strengths
  - Self-confidence
  - Self-Efficacy

Probe: Can you give me an example?

**Content Question: CASEL Core Competency of Social-Awareness**

3. How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of social awareness with respect to:
  - Perspective-Taking
  - Empathy
  - Appreciating Diversity
  - Respect for others

Probe: Can you give me an example?

**Content Question: CASEL Core Competency of Relationship Skills**

4. How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of relationship skills with respect to:



- Communication
- Social Engagement
- Relationship Building
- Teamwork

Probe: Can you give me an example?

**Content Question: CASEL Core competency of Responsible Decision Making**

5. How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of responsible decision making with respect to:
- Identifying problems
  - Analyzing situations
  - Solving problems
  - Evaluating
  - Reflecting
  - Ethical Responsibility

Probe: Can you give me an example?

**Opinion Question: Most Important Strategy**

6. Please identify the one CASEL Core Competency strategy that you consider to be the most important in helping to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.

Probe: Please explain why you identified this CASEL Core Competency as most important.

APPENDIX F

**Qualitative Interview Question Development Matrix**

Research Question(s)	Interview Question(s)	Source(s)
<p>RQ1 - How do African American TK-12 school principals in Riverside County, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies; self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making?</p>	<p>IQ1 - How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of self-management with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulse control</li> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Self-discipline</li> <li>• Self-motivation</li> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Organization skills</li> </ul> <p><u>Probe:</u> Can you give me an example?</p> <p>IQ2 - How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of self-awareness with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying emotions</li> <li>• Accurate self-perception</li> <li>• Recognizing strengths</li> <li>• Self-confidence</li> </ul> <p>Self-Efficacy <u>Probe:</u> Can you give me an example?</p>	<p>Sources: Literature Review</p> <p>CASEL Core Competencies.</p>

<p>RQ1 - How do African American TK-12 school principals in Riverside County, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies; self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making?</p>	<p>IQ3 - How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of social awareness with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-Taking</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating Diversity</li> <li>• Respect for others</li> </ul> <p><u>Probe:</u> Can you give me an example?</p> <p>IQ4 - How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of relationship skills with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Social Engagement</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul> <p>Teamwork <u>Probe:</u> Can you give me an example?</p> <p>IQ5 - How do you identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competency of responsible decision making with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying problems</li> <li>• Analyzing situations</li> <li>• Solving problems</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> </ul>	
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<p>RQ1 - How do African American TK-12 school principals in Riverside County, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies; self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting</li> <li>• Ethical Responsibility</li> </ul> <p><u>Probe:</u> Can you give me an example?</p>	
<p>RQ2 - What strategy within CASEL social emotional learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-12 school principals in Riverside County, California.</p>	<p>IQ6 – Please identify the one CASEL Core Competency strategy that you consider to be the most important in helping to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students.</p> <p>Probe: Please explain why you identified this CASEL Core Competency as most important.</p>	<p>Sources: Literature Review CASEL Core Competencies.</p>

## APPENDIX G

### IRB Approval

Dear Lisa C. Broomfield,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at [BUIRB@brandman.edu](mailto:BUIRB@brandman.edu). If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,  
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.  
Professor  
Organizational Leadership  
BUIRB Chair  
[ddevore@brandman.edu](mailto:ddevore@brandman.edu)  
[www.brandman.edu](http://www.brandman.edu)

## APPENDIX H

### Research Participant's Bill of Rights



#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

##### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY IRB

ADOPTED

NOVEMBER 2013

APPENDIX I

**Summary of Research Methods Used and Procedures**

Research Question	Interview Question
<p>1. How do African American elementary school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California identify and describe the strategies implemented to close the achievement gap that exists for African American students using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making?</p>	<p>Question 1 Question 2 Question 3 Question 4 Question 5</p>
<p>2. What strategies within the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning core competencies were perceived as most important by African American TK-6 school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties, California?</p>	<p>Question 6</p>