

Chapter 14

A School Model for Developing Access to Higher Education for African American: Social Capital and School Choice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the social inequalities in school choice and the racial disparities of college access. Utilizing the theories of social capital and social inclusion, the author provides a conceptual framework for developing a college-going school culture in charter schools. Through this lens, the author considers that the level of school support needs to be equitable to the varying stages of self-efficacy, academic behaviors, and post-secondary aspirations that students enter school with. The author suggests the importance of the RECIPE (rigorous curriculum, expectations, collegiality, interconnection, parental engagement, and exposure) to prepare African American students for college.

INTRODUCTION

School choice has recently been viewed as the mainstay of President Trump's educational reform plan (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). However, many critics believe school choice such as charter schools cannot fix educational problems and bring in opportunities to segregate or create an elitist culture of student demographics and backgrounds (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010). Although charter schools enroll students of color at an alarmingly disproportionate rate to White students (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Wells, Holme, Lopez, and Cooper, 2000), there are many charter schools that successfully increase academic achievement of underrepresented students such as first-generation, students of color, and/or low-income (Angrist et al., 2016; Cohodes, 2018; Curto & Fryer, 2014; Rose, Maranto, & Ritter, 2017). However, because of the inability for nu-

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merous public school systems to lessen the academic achievement gap of African American students residing in urban areas (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Rothstein, 2004; Wagner, 2014; Young & Young, 2017), alternative educational ideologies and practices, in regards to school reform, have recently become more suitable (Teasley et al., 2016). Therefore, charter schools that serve higher populations of African American students may benefit from creating an intentional structure that imbues a college-going school culture.

Despite the often-contentious conversations for and against school choice options, charter schools have emerged as the fastest growing educational innovation in the United States (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Between 2000 and 2015 charter school enrollment increased from 0.4 million to 2.8 million (McFarland et al., 2018). Furthermore, the number of charter schools in the United States and the District of Columbia have more than tripled increasing from 2,000 schools to 6,900 schools between 2000-01 and 2015-16. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 33% of students enrolled in charter schools are White, and 27% of students enrolled in charter schools are African American (McFarland et al., 2018).

A “college-going school culture” is defined as a school in which students receive motivation and support from multiple sources to prepare them with the knowledge needed for college success (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, McClafferty et al., 2002; Oakes, 2003). Multiple researchers have developed models for creating a college-going school culture to address the needs of students of color (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2009, McKillip et al., 2013; Oakes, 2003). However, these models have implications to impact traditional public-school formats, and minimal attention in the college-going literature has been devoted to addressing the conventional compositions of charter schools specifically. In this chapter, the author proposes a process model called the RECIPE for charter school principals to help them understand and navigate the steps and principles of building a college-going school culture for African American students. The proposed model provides a framework that systematizes prior work on the impact of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001) and social inclusion (Pocock, 1957; Fredericks, 2010) to challenge the traditional inequitable practices of promoting college for some, by ensuring students who historically have been deemed not college bound to see themselves as future college graduates. First, the author briefly describes the current college-going trends of African American students. The author will follow this with a multidisciplinary discussion of the RECIPE model for building a college-going school culture in the school administration context.

BACKGROUND

More than 33% of 5 to 17-year old’s in the United States are potential first-generation college students (Stark Education Partnership, 2015). What is more alarming is that first-generation college students who have less access to higher education are often students of color and/or low-income, further perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013). Coupled with legislative initiatives to ensure all students graduate college-ready (Conley, 2010), K-12 charter schools must be prepared to foster its growing diverse population with access and opportunity to transition to postsecondary education. Empirical research (Roderick et al., 2009; Schneider, 2007) suggests access to palpable resources, such as college-level courses, college access programs, and school counselor resources lead to higher academic achievement, attainment, and increases postsecondary matriculation. Unfortunately, historically underrepresented groups of students are less likely to have access to a robust college prepa-

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