Promoting Educational Resilience Among African American Students at Risk of

School Failure: The Role of School Counselors

Joseph M. Williams
George Mason University

Arie T. Greenleaf
Seattle University

Tracey Albert
George Mason University

Erin F. Barnes
University of Texas at El Paso

Abstract

While the educational difficulties of African American students from low-income households are well documented and widely discussed in the literature, far less attention has been paid to students who succeed in school despite significant challenges such as poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity. A review of the literature identifies the protective factors and processes that facilitate academic success among African American (K-12) students placed at-risk of school failure. Implications for school counselors and recommendations for facilitating educational resiliency among African American students from low-income households are discussed.

Keywords: resilience, education, African American students, at-risk

Promoting Educational Resilience Among African American Students

at Risk of School Failure: The Role of School Counselors

Aileen is a 15 year old African American girl in the 10th grade. She dresses modestly, makes good grades, and is typically well-behaved in class. Aileen's teachers describe her as talented, motivated, funny, and wise beyond her years. Her teachers and peers alike believe that she has a bright future ahead of her. What most of Aileen's teachers don't know is that she lives on the borderline of poverty. Aileen's mother has been unemployed or underemployed for more than three years, causing them to lose their home and any health insurance coverage they once had. For the past few months Aileen, her older brother, and her mother have been living with her aunt and cousins; seven of them share a two-bedroom apartment. She takes public transportation to school each day, rising every morning earlier than most of her teachers in order to get to school on time. Surprisingly, Aileen has been able to maintain her good grades and high placement scores in school despite these adverse conditions.

Every day in schools across the United States, African American students like Aileen overcome personal adversity and dire circumstances such as poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity to succeed academically (APA Task Force, 2008; Wyner, Bridgeland, & Diiulio, 2007). Students (like Aileen) who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions are often referred to as educationally resilient and have seldom been recognized or understood in school settings by school counselors and other educational stakeholders (Evans-Winter, 2005; Williams & Bryan, 2013; Wyner et al., 2007). Because of their academic achievements, school counselors and other education stakeholders often ignore the outside-of-school influences that affect long-

term success (Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004). For example, African American students from low-income households tend to live in areas of concentrated poverty besieged by joblessness, crime, violence, teen pregnancy, and drugs (Benson, 1997; Berliner, 2009). Research indicates that educationally resilient students who grow up in these areas are less likely than their peers from higher-income families to maintain their status as high achievers, to graduate from high school, to attend selective colleges, to graduate from college, and to receive a graduate degree (Wyner et al., 2007).

In order to prevent African American students from low-income households from slipping through the cracks of the public education system and sliding toward an unpromising future, school counselors must understand the protective factors and processes in students' lives (e.g., family, school, and community) that make it possible for students to thrive academically in the face of adversity, as represented by Aileen's story. Such understanding would help school counselors and other education stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members) to create, modify, and even remove if necessary, existing school policies, programs, and counseling services in order to improve outcomes for African American students placed at risk of school failure (Fraser, 2004; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Without a deeper awareness and understanding of protective factors and processes and their positive impact on a student's educational success, well-intended school policies, programs, and counseling services will likely be less effective (Fraser, 2004). For this reason, the purpose of this article is to highlight the protective factors and processes that facilitate academic success among African American students from low-income households. This article also provides school counselors and other stakeholders with specific

recommendations for facilitating educational resiliency among African American students from low-income households. For the purpose of this article, educational resilience is defined as the ability to succeed in school despite exposure to personal and environmental adversities (Wang & Gordon, 1994). In addition, the terms "household" and "family" will be used interchangeably in this article.

Balancing the Imbalance

While the educational difficulties of African American students from low-income households are well documented and widely discussed in the literature, far less attention has been paid to students who succeed in school despite significant challenges. Little is known about the environmental characteristics that stimulated academic achievement in students with limited economic and social resources (Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004; Ungar, 2005). Similarly, little is known about how environmental protective factors operate in the daily lives of current African American students (Evans-Winters, 2005). In the last two decades, only a few studies on resiliency have focused on resilient African American students (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991; Clark, 1983; Cook, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2005; Ford, 1993, 1994; Geary, 1988; Williams & Bryan, 2013). It is the intent of this article to provide a more balanced and insightful perspective of African American students from low-income households, by identifying the strengths (both personal and environmental) that protect these students from academic failure.

We believe a resiliency perspective does not demote or overlook the deleterious effects of economic hardship on the academic performance of African American students or dilute our obligation to this student population (Barton & Coley, 2009; Chau,

Thampi, & Wight, 2010). It does, however, add another dimension to the risk story. School counselors need to know about protective factors that mitigate the academic risk posed by economic hardship and the power of a holistic approach that provides a complete picture of the students they counsel (Henderson, 2007). With this knowledge, they can look for individual strengths and environmental protective conditions, nurture them, and try to facilitate their growth in the lives of their students. This will no doubt result in changes in how we do our work, and how we view the students who come to us (Henderson, 2007). We hope this article serves as an effective starting point.

Educational Resilience

Resilience refers to the capacity to recover from or adapt to difficult and challenging life circumstances (Benard, 1991). *Educational resilience* refers to the capacity to succeed in school despite exposure to personal and environmental adversities (Wang & Gordon, 1994). Research on educational resilience is limited and generally has focused on identifying the individual characteristics of resilient students who thrive academically in the face of adversity (Williams & Bryan, 2013). These characteristics include a wide array of optimism, internal affirmation, internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, assertiveness, the ability to solve problems; perceived social support, and having goals and aspirations to name a few (Ungar, 2005). Accordingly, researchers and educators have sought to identify these character traits in order to foster its development in students placed at risk of school failure**.**

However, a more meaningful conception views resilience not as a fixed attribute, but rather, the result of a combination of character traits and external protective factors. In other words, what makes a student "resilient" is the relative strength of individual

characteristics and external protective processes (e.g., supports provided by families, schools, and communities) compared to the influence of risks and vulnerabilities (e.g., as low socioeconomic status, inadequate resources, and fragmented services, low teacher expectations, and so forth) in the external environment. Gilligan (2004) writes,

> … while resilience may previously have been seen as residing in the person as a fixed trait, it is now more usefully considered as a variable quality that derives from a process of repeated interactions between a person and favorable features of the surrounding context in a person's life. The degree of resilience displayed by a person in a certain context may be said to be related to the extent to which that context [e.g., school] has elements that nurture this resilience (p.94).

Because resilience is being defined here as a dynamic rather than a static concept, school counselors, educators, families, and community members must foster educational resiliency in students by strengthening protective processes for students at critical moments in their lives (Henderson, 2007). When resilience is viewed as a developmental process that can be fostered, then strategies for change can be directed toward practices, policies, and attitudes among professional educators' of African American students from low socioeconomic status (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Risk and Protection

Educational resilience is established via a dynamic balance between two intrinsic properties: risk and protective factors (Rutter, 1990). As their names suggest, factors associated with each group work either to inhibit or promote healthy adaptation to adverse circumstances. While research has focused primarily on illuminating risk factors associated with academic failure, an understanding of protective factors is equally

important for elucidating the reasons some students succeed in school despite the presence of adversity (Greene & Conrad, 2002).

Defining Risk Factors

Resilience only occurs when individuals experience some type of risk or adversity. Children may be called competent, well adjusted, or normal, but they are not considered resilient until they deal with a significant risk and demonstrate the ability to overcome it (Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience literature generally describes risk factors as conditions that increase the likelihood of a problem developing (Green & Conrad, 2002). Fraser et al., (2004) define risk factors as "any influences that increase the probability of onset, digression to a more serious state, or maintenance of a problem condition" (p. 14). In other words, risk factors are individual characteristics or contextual conditions of a group of people, especially children and youth, that increase the probability of an undesirable outcome, such as school failure, psychiatric illness, criminal involvement, vocational instability, and poor social relationships later in life (Masten, 1994). It should be noted that risk factors do not guarantee that children will have academic or behavioral problems, but they do increase the opportunity and then likelihood for these problems to occur.

Resilience literature has also established that multiple adverse conditions can negatively affect the resilience capacity and healthy development of children and youth. For instance, Luster and McAdoo (1994) investigated the relationship between the number of risk factors that African American families and children were exposed to and the chance they were experiencing academic or behavioral problems. McCabe, Clark, and Barnett, (1999) conducted a similar study that examined the relationship between

child stressors, family risk factors, and the behavioral adjustment of African American youth. Both these studies concluded there is a positive relationship between the number and frequency of stress and risk factors and the high degree of academic, psychological and behavior problems observed in children. These findings and similar research provide evidence that African American families and children suffer a disproportionate share of risk factors. For many African American students, especially those from urban or inner-city schools, academic success is contingent upon their ability to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity.

Defining Protective Factors

As mentioned previously, resilience is not a personality trait that superficially prevents negative environments from influencing children and adolescents. Instead, it is a combination of protective factors found in personal attributes, support systems, institutions, resources, and the like that enable individuals to defy the effects of risk factors (Beauvais & Oetting, 1999). Protective factors imply an ecological conceptualization of both internal and external resources that moderate or mediate the effects of risk or adversity and enhance good adaptation or competence (Masten, 1994). Similarly, Greene and Conrad (2002) define protective factors as individual characteristics and environmental assets that buffer, interrupt, or even prevent risk.

Researchers have theorized that protective factors that promote positive school-related and developmental outcomes for youth are rooted in environmental interactions among three systems: family, community, and school (Benard, 1991; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fraser et al., 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). When protective factors are lacking within these systems, impacted students experience more vulnerability and are

more likely to achieve negative academic results. The reader is encouraged to explore *Risk and Resilience in Childhood: An Ecological Perspective* (Fraser, 2004) for a more comprehensive review of the risk and resilience literature.

Protective Factors Related to Educational Resilience

When working with African American students, it is imperative for school counselors to be aware of protective factors within the home, school, and community environments, since these environmental assets may have a direct or indirect impact on school-related and developmental outcomes for youth and may act as a buffer between educational failure and academic success (Murry & Brody, 1999). A better understanding of how these assets interact will encourage counselors who work with a vulnerable student population to plan programs and services that both mitigate existing risk and promote resiliency. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the various protective factors and processes in the home, school, and community environments that contribute to academic success among African American students at risk for school failure. Within each of these categories, we address the factors that have been linked to educational resilience.

Family Factors

Research consistently demonstrates that a powerful predictor of resiliency in children is the quality of the immediate care giving environment (Benard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992). For example, Williams and Bryan (2013) found that in spite of adversity, high achieving African American students from low-income, single-mother-led households experienced these specific school-related parenting practices and considered them some of the most important factors contributing to their academic

success: verbal praise for good grades; high, but realistic expectations; monitoring

academic progress in school; supervision of and help with school work; and the use of

physical discipline in response to bad grades and behavior in school. Students also

noted that along with a positive and open relationship with their mother, in particular,

their academic success benefited from being able to rely on extended family members

for academic support (Williams & Bryan, 2013). The researchers concluded that these

family protective factors serve as a buffer to many of the environmental barriers (e.g.,

family discord, inadequate housing, and financial insecurity) that too often undermine

academic success for students of color, and others, from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds.

Additionally, Clark (1983) found that high achieving African American high school

seniors from low-income households had parents who were able to establish clear and

specific boundaries. These parents were successful in maintaining a positive parent-

child relationship through nurturing, support, respect, and open communication. They

also exhibited an optimistic attitude about their children's ability to perform well. For

instance, these parents frequently communicated with the school, their children's older

siblings, and members of the community about academic preparation and progress. In

other words, the presence of at least one caring adult who provides stable care and

adequate attention serves as a protective factor for children across a variety of risk

conditions (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004)

Several other research studies and publications have established the importance

of positive family assets in promoting resilience, academic achievement, and healthy

development. These assets include family cohesion and warmth, the absence of

ongoing discord, the acceptance of responsibilities, the value placed on reading and homework, and the benefit of consistent supervision and consequential discipline (Bernard 1991, 1995, 2004; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004).

According to Bernard (2004), Masten & Coastsworth (1998), and Masten et al. (1999), the aforementioned family attributes are associated with: (a) improved student morale and academic achievement within all subject areas; (b) increased school attendance; (c) decreased student dropout, delinquency, and pregnancy rates; (d) increased likelihood to attend post-secondary education; and (e) increased self-efficacy, self-worth, and positive social relationships between students. In summary, a home environment characterized by positive parenting practices, secure and stable surroundings, involvement in school activities, and high expectations for youth, can serve as a protective deterrent to some of the risk factors these children encounter.

Findings from an exploratory study completed by Mullin & Arce (2008) revealed that families living in poverty were more likely to be resilient when they: (a) seek, receive, and give support as a way to build interconnections; (b) hold beliefs about themselves, the social, and/or spiritual world that nourishes them; and (c) take action steps to control their destiny. Mullin and Arce (2008) further contend that family resiliency is a dynamic interplay of several components, including family support, positive family beliefs, and action. When functioning together, these components give the family a sense of empowerment that enables it to face adversity. Likewise, McAdoo (1998) found that among low-income African American families, resiliency encompasses supportive social networks, including a connection with the church, with individual family members, and with the extended family; a connection with non-familial

relationships that eventually assume a familial role; and a connection that embraces strong ethnic group ties. Effective school counselors seek to promote resiliency in the home environment by identifying assets already in place and those to be developed within the family structure.

School Factors

Previous research has established the importance of the school environment and how it affects student achievement (Benard, 2004; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). In essence, schools are in a prime position to become a refuge for those students whose circumstances place them at risk for not only educational failure, but other negative outcomes as well (Benard, 1991). Several empirical studies of high-performing, high-poverty schools indicate that many of them are already successful at fostering educational resilience and are thus able to serve as models for schools desiring to improve their students' performance (Kober, 2001). These national studies used multiple research methods (i.e., comparative analysis and field-based studies; synthesis studies; correlational studies; survey studies; interviews, and/or focus groups; and intervention studies) to demonstrate the impact of resilience-promoting strategies on student learning in primary and secondary education.

Generally, results indicate that schools which serve youth from high-risk backgrounds are most successful when: (a) curriculum is rigorous, future-focused, and aligned to standards and assessments which promote high expectations for student performance; (b) teachers are well-prepared; (c) counselors, administrators, and teachers develop collaborative partnerships to advocate for and to promote students and their academic success; (d) support and preventive services are provided; (f)

school and classroom environments are safe and orderly; (g) data are used to improve curriculum and instruction and for defining the need and implementation of differential instruction; (h) school-based professionals, parents, and community leaders develop collaborative partnerships to analyze student needs; (i) goals are consistent and consistently understood; (j) new teachers are socialized into the high academic focus environment and assisted with instruction; (k) caring and supportive relationships among students and school-based professionals are formed; and (l) the focus is on academic achievement and not rule-following (Bennett, et al., 2004; Carey, 2002; Ceci & Papierno, 2005; Evans, 2004; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Kober, 2001; & Williams, et al., 2005).

These findings are consistent with Williams & Bryan (2013), and others (e.g., Barrow, Armstrong, Vargo, & Boothroyd, 2007; Byfield, 2008; and Evans-Winters, 2005) who found that resilient African American students reported specific factors at school that contributed to improved academic engagement and performance. These factors included: (a) having at least one caring adult at their school (e.g., a teacher, counselor, coach, or college recruiter) who knew them well and demonstrated warmth, concern, openness, and understanding; (b) the importance of close friendships among peers who valued education, despite similar negative circumstances, this serving as a source of accountability and motivation to succeed academically; (c) the importance of teachers with high standards but who made learning relevant, fun, and experiential, with lessons that connected curriculum to students' personal interests and lives; and (d) extracurricular school activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, and social

organizations) that rounded out their school involvement and contributed to their academic success.

Community Factors

Similar to the home and school environments, urban communities can provide an abundance of resources to support the educational resilience of their youth. The specific impact of community on well-being and resiliency has been the subject of much research (Barnett & Brennan, 2006). For example, Benard (2004) noted that healthy communities support families and schools; establish high expectations and clear norms; and encourage active participation and collaboration in the life and work of the community. Benard (1991) comments that "communities exert not only a direct influence on the lives of youth but, perhaps even more importantly, exert a profound influence on the lives of the families and schools within their domain and, thus, indirectly powerfully affect the outcome for children and youth" (p.16). Consequently, healthy urban communities can help children and youth who live in high-risk circumstances develop more confidently as they overcome adversity to achieve academic success (Benard, 2004; Wang, 1997).

Research involving youth participation in their communities has found that children and adolescents gain a sense of purpose as they achieve mastery in social competence, problem solving, and autonomy. They are also able to make valuable connections with the people in their neighborhood who are working to solve problems, which can be of value later on (Barrow et al., 2007). Brennan (2008) offers a conceptual framework that merges community and youth resiliency, formed by the understanding that local vulnerabilities and disadvantages require a social support system that fosters

local well-being and community agency. When African American youth are encouraged to become part of the community-development process, they experience a greater sense of agency and personal resilience as the community improves (Barrow et al., 2007; Brennan, 2008; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997).

Furthermore, several empirical studies have documented that neighborhoods which foster resilience among their youth provide some, if not all, of the following aspects: (a) safe recreational facilities, educational and employment opportunities, and preventative health care (Winfield, 1994); (b) supportive adults and organizations at the home, school, and community levels (Bowen & Chapman, 1996); (c) the presence of social organizations that provide for healthy human development, including health care facilities, child care services, job training opportunities, religious institutions, and recreational options (Williams & Bryan, 2013); (d) well-developed and integrated networks of social organizations that contribute to low neighborhood delinquency rates, improved public safety, school-based community services, and available religious communities (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1995); (e) student involvement in school- and community-wide activities that promote expressed social and cultural norms, becoming a first-hand learning opportunity for what constitutes desirable behaviors (Benard, 1991); and (f) high expectations for good citizenship as students develop new interests and skills (Barrow et al., 2007).

School counselors are ideally positioned to intervene in the lives of African American youth, due to close relationships with students and because of their commitment to the counseling profession (Bryan 2005; 2009; Ford, 1993; 1994). However, school counselors are rarely, if ever, intentionally taught to identify, mobilize,

and utilize the strengths and resources (i.e., found in family, school, and community) of African American students placed at risk of school failure (Henderson, 2007; Williams & Bryan, 2013). We can no longer afford to ignore or neglect the strengths or resources that contribute to the academic success of African American and other students placed at risk.

Fostering Educational Resilience in African American Students

Research has consistently shown that schools and school personnel such as principals, support staff, teachers, and school counselors play a critical role in the development of educational resilience among (K-12) students placed at risk of school failure. Based on the review of existing literature concerning protective factors and processes that contribute to the academic success of African American students (K-12) from low- income backgrounds, the following strategies are offered to school counselors and other school personnel as ways to foster educational resilience:

1. **Bring together families, schools, and communities through collaborative efforts such as strength-based partnership programs.** Strengths-based partnerships should focus on identifying, using, and enhancing strengths of African American students, their families, and the communities in which they live. Start by examining one's own attitudes and beliefs regarding the ability of African American families and communities to promote academic success among African American students. School counselors can take the following steps to build strong partnerships:, (a) assess the needs and strengths of students, their families, and community members; (b) connect with potential partners, cultural brokers, and persons of influence; (c) create a share vision and plan; (d) take action; and (e) evaluate and follow-up (Bryan & Henry, 2012).

2. **Advocate for students in and out of school.** School counselors might find it beneficial to get training in leadership and advocacy skills so that they might: (a)

teach students and parents about their rights and provide them with self-advocacy tools; (b) support students and families in accessing relevant existing resources within the school and community; (c) secure buy-in and gain support from administrators, school officials, parents and others who will assist in working toward reducing risk factors and promoting positive protective factors within the school and community context; and (d) develop partnerships with community agencies that provide other services (i.e., counseling, social support, and prevention programs); and (e) compile data to demonstrate the relationship between advocacy and the improved academic performance of African American students (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

3. **Learn more about the students' lives outside of school.** School counselors are in a prime position to learn about their students' lives outside of the school day through directive conversations, home visits during which students provide tours of the neighborhood if possible, visits to local community centers to find out about the cultural activities and beliefs of students, utilize photo voice projects or community assets maps. These efforts signify a commitment to a student's success, while helping counselors to identify local resources, and "funds of knowledge" that exist within families and communities and to gain insight into the barriers to academic success for low-income African American students.

4. **Assist parents in understanding and navigating the politics of schools**. School counselors can provide parents with information about the political and cultural environment of public education (and the social and mental health systems) to prepare them to better navigate school systems on behalf of their children. These efforts empower parents to advocate for a rigorous curriculum, for their child's placement in rigorous courses, for extracurricular activities, and for more caring teacher-student interactions that may involve a discussion of sensitive issues, such as racial discrimination and teacher bias in schools (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

5. **Assist parents in accessing social capital**. Assist parents through strategies such as planning meetings around parents' schedules and gearing meetings topics around culturally sensitive needs and identified goals. Help create a safe space for parents to share information, knowledge, and resources. By doing so, counselors can create opportunities for parents to build supportive networks among families and augment the support they provide to their children (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Such services should be empowering, culturally sensitive, and geared toward the parenting needs and goals identified by parents and centered on parents' schedules.

6. **Embed an ethic of care in school policies and practices.** School counselors can implement strategies that improve the school climate and establish the school as a place where students are able to connect to caring adults. Such strategies might include: (a) providing professional development on cultural awareness; (b) consulting with school personnel to create counseling, academic, discipline, instructional, and classroom strategies and interventions that create caring teacher–student relationships; and (c) implementing culturally relevant behavioral and communicative strategies that relay caring and support, high expectations, and affirmations for African American students from low-income backgrounds.

7. **Teach African American students about their resiliency.** Help African American students identify and understand the personal attributes and environmental resources that contribute to their own resiliency. In doing so, students, in collaboration with the school counselor can figure out how they can use those same protective factors now or in the future in dealing with problems/barriers to their academic success. School counselors might consider asking students to identify some of the struggles, challenges, difficulties you have faced in the past and to share how they overcame these difficulties. Potential follow-up questions might include: (a) what did you do? (b) what beliefs about yourself and others guided you? (c) who helped you? (d) how did they help?; (e)

what else helped you? (f) who can you go to for support (g) what else would help and how can you access it ? (Henderson, 2007).

8. **Integrate Resiliency into what you already do.** School counselors should use a resiliency-based approach to school counseling, which focuses on implementing system-wide interventions rather than a sole focus on the individual and reducing risk factors and promoting positive protective factors within the school context. School counselors might consider using the resiliency wheel in schools to guide their resiliency building efforts. The resiliency wheel is a research-based model that organizes the key concepts of resiliency (i.e., caring and support; high expectations; opportunities for participation pro-social bonding clear, consistent boundaries, life skills) to help protect, support, and nurture a students' capacity for resiliency.

9. **Identify diverse forms of parent/caregiver involvement, and provide different outlets for family participation**. School counselors can help school personnel redefine their vision of family involvement, understanding this implies change in both policy and practice**.** Similar, school counselors can help identify the non-traditional ways parents are involved in their children's education and develop school strategies for increasing this involvement. Parental involvement programs should be centered on empowerment, outreach, and indigenous resources. For instance, strategies might include: (a) offering parents training or skills that allow them to be more involved in their children's education; (b) making services more accessible by programs designed to meet parents "where they are" in familiar and comfortable settings in their communities; and (c) use existing parent-oriented supports within the family and community setting (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006, pgs. 5-8).

These recommendation underscore the critical need for African American children who are subject to personal adversity and dire circumstances, both of which can lead to

negative outcomes (i.e., school failure, drug abuse, criminal activity), to draw on protective factors within themselves (e.g., emotion regulation and problem-solving skills) and within their families, schools, and communities (e.g., parents as advocates) so they can develop and achieve academic, personal/social and career success, along with overall well-being.

Conclusion

In order to empower African American students who are vulnerable or disenfranchised, school counselors and other school personnel must first recognize needs and then implement interventions that focus on strengths and assets within each student and family, and within the community as well (Bryan & Henry, 2008). School counselors are encouraged to adopt a systemic approach for evaluating the various aspects of students' lives and for utilizing multiple resources to solve problems. Interventions from across the board mean more opportunities will be in place to facilitate personal development, to decrease risk, and to foster a supportive and protective environment for students while in school and beyond the boundaries of school. The reader might find the suggested readings in the Appendix section of this article helpful in providing additional information and resources related to implementing these recommendations.

More research is needed to uncover how some protective factors (e.g., family, school, and community) may contribute to positive outcomes. Future research should therefore concentrate on protective processes (i.e., understanding how different factors are involved in both promoting well-being and protecting against risk). Further research might explore the protective factors and processes that contribute to the resilience and

academic success of African American students across major geographical regions and contexts (e.g., rural, suburban, urban, affluent, impoverished areas). It would be interesting to compare experiences of comparing resilient and non-resilient African American students within the same setting. Lastly, a further study could utilize a longitudinal research design that considers influence from school, family, communities, and peers over time.

References

Abdul-Adil, J. K., & Farmer, A. D. (2006). Inner-city African American parental involvement in elementary schools: Getting beyond urban legends of apathy. *School Psychology Quarterly, 21*(1), 1-12. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1521%2Fscpq.2006.21.1.1

American Psychological Association Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents. (2008). *Resilience in African American children and adolescents: A vision for optimal development*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/cyf/resilience.html

Barnett, R. V., & Brennan, M. A. (2006). Integrating youth into community development: Implications for policy planning and program evaluation. *Journal of Youth Development, 1*, 2-16.

Barrow, F. H., Armstrong, M. I., Vargo A., & Boothroyd, R. D. (2007). Understanding the findings of resilience-related research for fostering the development of African American adolescents. *Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America Journal, 16*, 393-413. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.chc.2006. 12.004

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2009). *Parsing the achievement gap II*. Princeton, NJ: The Educational Testing Service.

Beauvais, F., & Qetting, E. R. (1999). Drug use, resilience, and the myth of the golden child. In M. D. Glantz & J. L. Johnson (Eds.), *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations* (pp. 101-107). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C. Y. (2005). Advocacy as a critical role for urban school counselors: Working toward equity and social justice. *Professional School Counseling, 8*, 196-203.

Benard, B. (1991). Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

Benard, B. (1995). Fostering resilience in children. ERIC/EECE Digest, EDO-PS-95-9.

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned.* San Francisco, CA: WestEd

Bennett, A., Bridglall, B. L., Cauce, A. M., Everson, H. T., Gordon, E. W., Lee, C. D.,…Stewart, J. K. (2004). *All students reaching the top: Strategies for closing academic achievement gaps.* Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved from http://www.ncrel.org/gap/studies/thetop.htm

Benson, P. L. (1997). *All kids are our kids.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Berliner, D. C. (2009). Poverty and potential: Out-of-school factors and school success. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential

Bowen, G. L., & Chapman, M. V. (1996). Poverty, neighborhood danger, social support, and the individual adaptation among "at risk" youth in urban areas. *Journal of Family Issues, 17*, 641-666. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/01925139 6017005004

Braddock, J. H., Royster, D. A., Winfield, L. F., & Hawkins, R. (1991). Bouncing back: Sports and academic resilience among African American males. *Urban*

Education, 24, 113-131. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/001312459

1024001009

Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools

through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling,*

8, 219-227.

Bryan, J. (2009). Engaging clients, families, and communities as partners in mental

health. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 87,* 507-511. Retrieved from

http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00138.x

Bryan, J., & Henry, L. (2008). Strengths-based partnerships: A school-family-community

partnership approach to empowering students. *Professional School Counseling,*

12, 149-156. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.5330%2FPSC.n.2010-12.149

Bryan, J., & Henry, L. (2012). A model for building school-family-community

partnerships: Principles and process. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 90,*

408-420. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1002%2Fj.1556-6676.2012.00052.x

Brennan, M. A. (2008). Conceptualizing resiliency: An interpersonal perspective for

community and youth development. *Child Care in Practice, 14*(1), 55-64.

Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13575270701733732

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA:

Harvard University Press.

Byfield, C. (2008). *Black boys can make it: How they overcome the obstacles to*

university in the UK and USA. Sterling, VA: Trentham Books Ltd.

Carey, K. (2002). *State poverty-based education funding: A survey of current programs and options for improvement.* Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Ceci, S. J., & Papierno, P. B. (2005, February-March). The rhetoric and reality of gap closing: When the "have-nots" gain but the "haves" gain even more. *American Psychologist ,60*, 149-160. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1037%2F0003-066X.60.2.149

Chau, M., Thampi, K., & Wight, V. R. (2010). Basic facts about low-income children. Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_398.html

Clark, R. (1983). *Family life and school achievement: Why poor Black children succeed or fail*? Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cook, K. V. (2000). "You have to have somebody watching your back, and if that's God, then that's mighty big": The church's role in the resilience of inner-city youth. *Adolescence, 35*, 717-730.

Corcoran, J., & Nichols-Casebolt, A. (2004). Risk and resilience ecological framework for assessment and goal formulation. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 21,* 211-235. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1023%2FB%3ACASW.0000028453. 79719.65

Evans, G. W. (2004). The environment of childhood poverty. *American Psychologist. 59*, 77-92. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1037%2F0003-066X.59.2.77

Evans-Winters, V. (2005). *Teaching black girls: Resiliency in urban classrooms.* New York: Peter Lang.

Ford, D. Y. (1993). An investigation into the paradox of underachievement among gifted

    Black students. *Roeper Review, 16*, 78-84. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/

    10.1080/02783199309553544

Ford, D. Y. (1994). Nurturing resilience in gifted Black youth. *Roeper Review, 17*, 80-85.

    Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02783199409553630

Fraser, M. W. (2004). The ecology of childhood: A multisystems perspective. In M. W.

    Fraser (Ed.), *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective* (2nd ed.,

    pp. 1-12). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Fraser, M. W., Kirby, L. D., & Smokowski, P. R. (2004). Risk and resilience in childhood.

    In M. W. Fraser (Ed.). *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological*

    perspective, (pp. 13-66). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Geary, P. A. (1988) 'Defying the odds?' academic success among at-risk minority

    teenagers in an urban high school. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the

    American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA (ERIC Document

    Reproduction Service, No. 296 055).

Greene, R., & Conrad, A. P. (2002). Basic assumptions and terms. In R. Greene (Ed.),

    Resiliency: An integrated approach to practice, policy, and research (pp.29-62).

    Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Gilligan, R. (2004). Promoting resilience in child and family social work: Issues for social

    work practice, education and policy. *Social Work Education, 23,* 93-104.

    Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080%2F0261547032000175728

Henderson, N. (2007). *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families, and communities.* Solvang, CA: Resiliency in Action.

Kannapel, P. J., & Clements, S. K., with Taylor, D., & Hibpshman, T. (2005). Inside the black box of high-performing high-poverty schools. Lexington, KY: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. Retrieved from http://www.prichard committee.org/Ford%20Study/FordReportJE.pdf

Kober, N. (2001). *It takes more than testing: Closing the achievement gap.* A report of the Center on Education Policy. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

Koonce, D., & Harper, W. (2005). Engaging African American parents in the schools: A community-based consultation model. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *16*, 55-74. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1207%2Fs1532768 xjepc161%262_4

Luster, T. & McAdoo, H. P. (1994). Factors related to the achievement and adjustment of young African-American children. *Child Development, 65,* 1080-1094. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2307%2F1131306

Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *The School-Community Journal, 13*, 35-64.

Masten, A. S. (1994). Resilience in individual development: Successful adaptation despite risk and adversity. In M. C. Wang & E. W. Gordon (Eds.), *Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects* (pp. 3-25). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrance Erlbaum.

Masten, A. S., Coastworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable

and unfavorable environments: Lessons from research on successful children.

American Psychologist, *53*, 205-220. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1037

%2F%2F0003-066X.53.2.205

Masten, A. S., Hubbard, J. J., Gest, S. D., Tellegen, A., Garmezy, N., & Ramirez, M.

(1999). Competence in the context of adversity: Pathways to resilience and

maladaptation from childhood to late adolescence, *Development and*

Psychopathology, *11*, 143-169. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1017%2

FS0954579499001996

Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. J. (2002). Resilience in development. In C. R. Snyder & S. J.

Lopez (Eds.), *The handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 74-88). Oxford

University Press.

McAdoo, H. P. (1998). African American families. In C. H. Mendel, R. W. Habenstein,

and R. Wright, Jr. (Eds.), *Ethnic families in America: Patterns and variations* (pp.

361-381). New York: Prentice-Hall.

McCabe, K. M., Clark, R., & Barnett, D. (1999). Family protective factors among urban

African American youth. *Journal of Child Clinical Psychology*, 28, 137-150.

Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1207%2Fs15374424jccp2802_2

Mitra, D. L. (2009). Student voice and student roles in education policy and policy

reform. In D. N. Plank, G. Sykes, & B. Schneider (Eds.), *AERA Handbook on*

Education Policy Research (pp. 819-830). London: Routledge.

Mullin, W. J., & Arce, M. (2008) Resilience of families living in poverty. *Journal of Family Social Work* 11, 424-440. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080%2F1052215 0802424565

Murry, V. M., & Brody, G. H. (1999). Self-Regulation and self-worth of Black children reared in economically stressed, rural, single mother-headed families. *Journal of Family Issues, 20*, 458-484. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1177%2F019251 399020004003

Orthner, D. K., Jones-Sanpei, H., & Williamson, S. (2004). The resilience and strengths of low-income families. *Family Relations, 53*(2), 159-167. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.0022-2445.2004.00006.x

Richman, J. M., Bowen, G. L., & Woolley, M. E. (2004). School failure: An eco-interactional-developmental perspective. In M. W. Frasier (Ed.), *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective* (2nd ed.) (pp. 133-160). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Rutter, M. (1990). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. In J. E. Rolf, A. S. Masten, D. Cicchetti, K. Nuechterlein, & S. Weintraub (Eds.), *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology* (pp.181-214). New York: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO 9780511752872.013

Ungar, M. (Ed.) (2005). Introduction: Resilience across cultures and contexts. *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wang, M. C., & Gordon, E. W. (1994). *Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Wang, M., Haertel, G., & Walberg, H. (1995). The effectiveness of collaborative school linked services, In L. C. Rigsby, M. C. Reynolds, & M. C. Wang (Eds.) *School-community connections: Exploring issues for research and practice* (pp. 21-43) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1997). Fostering educational resilience in inner-city schools. *Laboratory for Student Success Publication Series, No. 4* Retrieved from http://eric.ged.gov/?id=ED419856

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Williams, T., Kirst, M., Woody, E., Levin, J., Perry, M., Haertel, E., …Levine, R. (2005). *Similar students, different results: Why do some schools do better? A large-scale survey of California elementary schools serving low-income students.* Mountain View, CA: EdSource. Retrieved from http://www.edsource.org/pdf/SimStu05.pdf

Williams, J. M., & Bryan, J. (2013). Overcoming adversity: High-achieving African American youth's perspectives on educational resilience. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *91*, 290-299.

Winfield, L. F. (1994). *Developing resilience in urban youth (Urban Education Monograph Series).* Oakbrook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Wyner, J. S., Bridgeland, J. M., & DiIulio, J. J. (2007). *Achievement trap: How America is failing millions of high-achieving students from lower-income families.* Lansdowne, VA: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

Appendix

Akos, P. (2003). Resiliency in school counseling. *Prevention Researcher, 10*, 8-10.

Bailey, D. F., & Bradbury-Bailey, M. E. (2010). Empowered youth programs:

Partnerships for enhancing postsecondary outcomes of African American

adolescents. *Professional School Counseling, 14*, 64-74.

Henderson, N. (2012). The resiliency workbook: Bounce back stronger, smarter and

with real self-esteem. Solvang, CA: Resiliency in Action.

Lindsey, T. P. (2000). Responding to the call to care with the pre-service teachers.

Reflective Practice, 1, 269-282. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080%

2F713693150

Masten, A., Herbers, J., Cutuli, J., & Lafavor, T. (2008). Promoting competence and

resilience in the school context. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 76-84.

http://dx.doi.org/10.5330%2FPSC.n.2010-12.76

Moore-Thomas, C., & Day-Vines, N. L. (2010). Culturally competent collaboration:

School counselor collaboration with African American families. *Professional*

School Counseling, 14, 53-63.

Pianta, R. C., Stuhlman, M., & Hamre, B. K. (2002). How schools can do better:

Fostering stronger connections between teachers and students. In J. E. Rhodes

(Ed.), *A critical view of youth mentoring* (pp. 91-107). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-

Bass.

Rak, C. F., & Patterson, L. E. (1996). Promoting resilience in at-risk students. *Journal of*

Counseling and Development, 74, 368-373. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.

1002/j.1556-6676.1996.tb01881.x

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for

   participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*(3), 369-387.

   http://dx.doi.org/10.1177%2F109019819702400309

Washington, A. R. (2010). Professional school counselors and African American males:

   Using school/community collaboration to enhance academic performance.

   Journal of African American Males in Education, 1, 26-39.