6-2024

Transition Plans: A Critical Phenomenological Study of the Young Black Men's Parents' Experiences at Admission Review and Dismissal Meetings

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Dr. Dena Counts for
Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Date: April 1, 2024

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Bobby F. Durst

June 2024

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Black males and their parents with learning disabilities who are marginalized and sit in silence during transition meetings. Fighting against systems that oppress Black males with learning disabilities is a relentless journey. Advocating for people who have been broken and do not understand the system that they are in is grueling. My reason for unveiling systematic racism is intentional and meaningful. I have a child who has experienced this broken system. Its legacy has placed Black males with learning disabilities on the classroom-to-prison pipeline, which continues to this day if high school transition plans are inadequate. If their goals, strengths, and aspirations are not articulated or understood during IEP meetings, their inability to be successful incapacitates not only our communities and state but our global society, as well.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God and acknowledge that it is He who has kept me through this dissertation journey. God encouraged my spirit and provided perseverance when I wanted to quit during my moments with tear-stained eyes. I would like to thank Dr. Scott Self, my dissertation chair, who, during this journey, has provided guidance throughout my degree by providing prayer during difficult times, feedback, and insight. I am grateful to my dissertation committee members, who have waited patiently for the completion of my work. I owe so much gratitude to my family. To my husband, who had to tolerate the books in bed, for taking an interest in my work, providing a listening ear when I became frustrated, and for his encouragement. I want to thank Gregory for allowing me to grow in my educational endeavors during our marriage beyond my wildest dreams; I love you. To my sons Dexter, Darius, Kerison, and my nephews, I do what I do to provide an example of how you own your education, and no one can take it away. In remembrance of our son Aubery Jermel Williams, who gained his wings before I could complete this journey, he often told me, “Momma, you are the smartest woman you know.” Those words resonated with me and reminded me that I could not quit. To my sister, who provided food for my family when I was busy writing. I would not have had the opportunity to pursue this degree if it were not for my parents. Thank you, Momma and Daddy, for always asking, “Are you still in school?” Those words were motivation to work harder and faster. All of you have been with me on this journey, and I appreciate your impact on my life. I receive this degree in honor of my son, Aubrey Jermel Williams, MG4L.

Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the narrative shared in individualized education planning meetings for young black men with learning disabilities who are transitioning from high school. The individualized education plan (IEP) process, essential in addressing the specific educational needs of children with learning disabilities, can be particularly challenging for Black parents, as evidenced by recent data. This study was designed to shed light on the intricate dynamics of the IEP process and the unique challenges faced by parents. The study aimed to provide insight into various aspects of their experiences through interviews designed with open-ended questions and detailed analysis of the data collected. Admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) meeting experience which explores the range of experiences parents have during ARD meetings, from feelings of inclusion and being heard to experiences of being marginalized. The study revealed parents' varying levels of understanding regarding the specialized language used in the IEP process. The study also identified the demographic makeup of ARD meetings, particularly the presence of Black individuals, which is crucial for understanding the inclusivity of these meetings. During IEP meetings, parents frequently feel overwhelmed by the rapid and complex nature of IEP meetings, leading to confusion and a sense that these sessions are just formalities without substantial dialogue. A major issue for parents is feeling unheard in IEP meetings. There is a crucial need for more inclusivity, ensuring students’ and parents' perspectives are recognized and integrated into their children's education plans. Parents often experience a mix of emotions when dealing with their child's IEP. These emotions range from apprehension and frustration. Recognizing parents' emotional responses is vital in IEP meetings. Their confusion and frustration must be acknowledged and addressed through open communication. This enhances the meeting experience, ensuring parents feel heard and understood in the process. Train teachers

to build relationships with special education students. Implement mentoring programs for young black men in special education. Educate parents on their rights before ARD meetings. Ensure student and parent involvement in meetings and goal setting. Develop clear postsecondary transition plans. The study aimed to provide a factual account of parents' experiences but also seeks to offer a platform for their voices to be heard and understood. By delving into these aspects, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic approach in the education system, particularly in the context of special education and the IEP process.

Keywords: African American males, Black males, learning disabilities, individualized education plan (IEP), special education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Kerison is a Black male senior at Southeast East Texas High School in a rural, predominantly White school (PWI) district. Kerison qualifies for special education services as a student with specific learning disabilities in written expression and math calculations. Kerison is aware of his disabilities and advocates for himself to receive accommodations to be academically successful. He takes advantage of after-school tutorials. Teacher expectations during individualized education planning (IEP) meetings were low, and they did not discuss college admissions until Kersion stated his postsecondary plans.

In most cases, teachers and counselors would offer other alternatives such as trade schools, certification programs, or a list of potential labor jobs. He has, at times, felt that he had been disciplined unfairly for minor infractions. During an IEP meeting, he stated he felt like he was walking on eggshells. Kerison also said there were times when he felt he could do nothing right. He is an exceptional athlete who had aspirations of attending a Christian university in Texas. During his senior year, Kerison's college choice changed from a D1 school to a small rural college in Texas. He shared that there were times when teachers and administrators held him to standards that, because of his disabilities, he could not achieve. However, there were times when the same teachers and administrators believed he was not college material and should look for an entry-level position in the job market. Since 1992, the Rehabilitation Act Amendment has mandated that transition services for students with disabilities provide vocational rehabilitation (Rabren & Evans, 2016). As his parent, I was infuriated at how these experiences changed the trajectory of his life. Several comprehensive reviews of parent educational involvement research find that students benefit in myriad ways when their parents are involved

(Hirano et al., 2016). This study examined parents' experiences during admission review and dismissal (ARD) meetings to write the IEP for African American boy students.

Educators, administrators, school policies, and practices have effectively ushered Black male students from the classroom into the criminal justice system, creating the classroom-to-prison pipeline theory (Nance, 2016). When school policies were examined, Black men's achievement correlated with where the student attended school (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). African American men who attended public schools that were unequally funded and had unequal access to resources caused these students to fall into the lower-ability academic track (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). According to Walker (2014), "School policies and practices have contributed significantly to the systemic failure of Black males. No Child Left Behind, established in 2001, was designed to close the achievement gap, but, on the contrary, has widened it" (p. 340).

The achievement gap is not a problem only for Black men, their communities, and their families; it has become a nationwide problem, affecting the country's well-being. Ethical disparities underpin the achievement gap of Black men, and skin color creates a domino effect on the social issues Black men's face in the public school system. Ethical factors include peer influences, parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and discipline disparities (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Allen and White-Smith (2014) stated that the teacher is the most impactful ethical factor hindering Black men's opportunities.

Researchers have focused on the academic performance of Black men for years. As early as primary school, African American men have lacked positive reinforcement from educators; they must be academically successful (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). The experiences of African American male students cause students to change their trajectories or ideologies about

postsecondary education (Vanzant-Chambers & Spikes, 2016). Research has provided some factors that give insight into why African American men have had limited educational opportunities (Allen, 2015). Public schools play a role in contributing to the achievement gap of African American men (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Disproportionate discipline patterns are casualties that give African American men negative experiences (Slaten et al., 2016). When compared with their White counterparts, African American men students are disciplined more harshly, receive more out-of-school suspensions, and many times are viewed as incompetent or incapable of learning (Slaten et al., 2016).

Black men experience negative outcomes in our educational system. Black men are forced to abide by a different set of unwritten rules equating to racial basis and prejudice. These behaviors have flowed over into the public education system and contributed to the achievement gaps of Black men, subsequently putting these students on a pipeline from the classroom to prison. Research has shown that achievement gaps appear as early as the second grade (Prager, 2011). Black men are not getting fair and equitable treatment in the classrooms. Although the problem starts with leadership, it surfaces in the classroom environment. Educators are unaware of the internal struggles Black men have and fail to relate to them to produce positive results. As the mother of four Black men, I have experienced the unwritten rules of the classroom along with the public education system. I want to shed light on the experiences that Black men have in public education. People take the effects of society lightly when it comes to Black men and how they internalize situations.

Black students with disabilities reflect a different set of dynamics in our world of research. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was coined in 1975 to recognize students with learning disabilities (EACHA; Pullen, 2016). A learning disability is a disorder of

one or more basic psychological processes that involve understanding, using spoken or written language (Pullen, 2016). Researchers have studied these two phenomena individually and have done so without collecting the experiences of young Black men, high school students, with disabilities or their parents who are considering postsecondary studies, leaving a gap in the literature. This study collected data to examine parents' experiences during IEP meetings for Black men.

Statement of the Problem

The American educational climate commits to all students becoming academically ready and college and career-ready (Harris et al., 2017). African American men with learning disabilities need to be prepared for postsecondary opportunities to move to postsecondary settings (Harris et al., 2017). Transitional services are pivotal for African American men with learning disabilities to attend colleges of their choice, so knowing the factors that hinder college transition with students who have disabilities is important (Banks, 2014).

According to Banks (2014), African American men with learning disabilities face barriers to postsecondary education. Graham and Nevarez (2017) revealed that administrators, teachers, and counselors exacerbate educational inequities among African American male students with learning disabilities. For example, counselors could guide students to postsecondary settings other than college because of their disabilities instead of their academic ability (Banks & Gibson, 2020). Counselors of African American male students with learning disabilities during the Individual Transition Plan (IEP) meetings had different goals for postsecondary education (Banks & Gibson, 2020). The study also found disconnects between African American male students with learning disabilities and counselors' expectations during ARD meetings when preparing students for postsecondary studies (Banks & Gibson, 2020). Interviews of African

American male students with disabilities collected by Banks and Gibson (2020), indicated that students desired to attend postsecondary education but were enrolled in vocational track courses and exempt from taking state standardized tests. Cavendish and Connor (2017) established that IEP and transition meetings were focused on compliance with the law instead of student needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of a phenomenological narrative was to explore the transitional barriers through the experiences of parents who have African American male students with learning disabilities to improve their trajectory to postsecondary education (Banks, 2014). The study examined the conversations during IEP meetings involving the parents of African American men with learning disabilities to understand the actions of administrators and educators because successful postsecondary outcomes are linked to transition planning (Trainor et al., 2016).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Black parents with young men with a specific learning disability perceive the IEP process?

RQ2: How do parents of young black men labeled with learning disabilities who are transitioning from high school describe their IEP meeting experience?

RQ3: Do parents of young black men have recommendations of practice for IEP teams based upon their experience?

Definitions of Key Terms

Achievement gap. The achievement gap in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between different groups of students (Mason et al., 2019).

Admission Review and Dismissal Committee (ARDC). Committee for admission, evaluation, and dismissal. This refers to a group of school officials and parents who are in charge

of creating the IEP and placing the child in an appropriate program. Although most states refer to this group as an IEP team, Texas refers to it as an ARDC (Walsh et al., 2014).

African American. The term *African American* is currently being used interchangeably with the term *Black* and is increasingly being advanced as a self-reference for Americans of African descent (Ghee, 1990, p. 75).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A federal law passed in December 2015 governs the United States' K–12 public education policy. The law replaced its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act, and modified but did not eliminate provisions relating to the periodic standardized tests given to students. The federal law ensures that all students, from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary, are low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and their historically marginalized students, have access to a world-class education that prepares them for college, career, and life (Adler-Greene, 2019).

Individual education plan (IEP). The individualized education plan (IEP) provides the framework for meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities (Franklin, 1981). The document must include a list of the specific educational services the child needs.

Individual education plan meeting. The IEP meeting is where parents, teachers, administrators, school personnel, and students communicate the educational needs of students. As equal participants in the meeting, stakeholders agree on the services for the student's success (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines a range of special education settings and placements for students with disabilities that exist on a continuum. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2005;

codified as 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.). Eligible students with disabilities in public school must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who do not have disabilities, 20 U.S.C. 1412 (a)(5)(A) (Supp. IV 2005). Students with disabilities can only be educated in a more restrictive setting when the severity of the student's disability significantly impairs the student's ability to be in a general education classroom (Strassfeld, 2016).

Learning disability. The term is used to describe students with achievement levels lower than expected average or high IQ, which includes dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia (Shifrer, 2018).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A federal law that funds extra educational assistance to aid economically disadvantaged children in exchange for improvement in their academic progress.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this phenological study was to collect the lived experiences of Black parents who have young men identified with a specific learning disability and who receive special education services in secondary education. A “learning disability” is an educational construct that is defined as a student having a deficit in their expected academic ability and achievement in one of the following seven areas: basic reading skills, comprehension, listening comprehension, oral expression, written expression, math calculation, and mathematical reasoning (Morgan et al., 2015). The U.S. Department of Education’s definition of a specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes. The disability is in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, and do mathematical calculations. Students do not learn adequately when provided with the usual developmental opportunities and instruction from a regular school environment (García-Carrión et al., 2018; Medina, 2018).

The Black Experiences in American Education

The history of the African American male has been one of struggle: a thirst for self-awareness, masculinity, and a fight for respect and independence within society (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). Young black men are the most vulnerable students in the U.S. public education system who confront systemic and institutional problems (Milner et al., 2013). As soon as Black male students come through the doors of American schools, labels such as "criminal," "violent," “anti-school,” and “hardcore” are applied, causing exclusion, discrimination, and inequitable punishment procedures to be implemented against them (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). It has been common practice in the past to reprimand Black male pupils for engaging in culturally expressive conduct, such as rapping or strutting across the schoolyard, or for donning hats or

expressive attire or wearing pants with loosened belts (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). Most educators consider these behaviors unpleasant, disrespectful, arrogant, intimidating, and threatening and do not believe they are conducive to learning (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). Because of the lack of congruence between Black students and their teachers, they may feel uncomfortable and out of place, which can have a negative impact on their self-confidence and school success, resulting in an academic disconnect (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020).

Many Black men's first signs of academic disengagement appear around the fourth grade (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). At the same time, teachers stop encouraging students to achieve academic goals, which leads to indifference and disengagement among those students (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). When Black men are denied relevant, meaningful learning possibilities or suffer from a lack of subject matter expertise, they tend to detach from instruction and act cool to look strong and in control of the situation (Hawkins-Jones & Reeves, 2020). According to Hawkins-Jones & Reeves (2020), “Young black men need champion educational experiences where they can create their own achievements, feel culturally and academically connected, and can attain academic success” (p. 45).

Black elementary students are disciplined 30% more often than their peers (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Almost seven out of every thousand elementary students are expelled (Heitzeg, 2009), which is a large part of recent studies that provide insight into disciplinary trends for students in grades pre-k–fifth grade (Banks, 2017). From 2015–2016 in Texas, 63,874 students from pre-kindergarten through 5th grade experienced out-of-school suspensions (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, 2020). One hundred forty-four thousand four hundred thirty-two (144,432) students were taken out of their homeroom classes and sent to in-school suspension (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, 2020). In 2017–2018, students of color in childcare (i.e., pre-

kindergarten to 2nd grade) in Texas were three times more likely to be suspended than their peers (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, 2020). This has become so extensive that scholars, child advocates, and community organizations refer to the school-to-prison pipeline as "the cradle-to-prison pipeline" since it affects younger students (Heitzeg, 2009). Students who were suspended or expelled for a disciplinary offense were three times more likely to be placed in the juvenile justice system, according to research on school discipline and student achievement (Fabelo et al., 2011). A year after their disciplinary consequence, students who have been suspended are at a higher risk of being arrested (Mowen & Brent, 2016). There is supporting evidence that shows a strong correlation between punitive discipline and adverse developmental results (Yang et al., 2018). In her book *The New Jim Crow*, Michell Alexander explains how the criminal justice system functions as a kind of social control to keep Black men as second-class citizens (Alexander, 2012). Inequalities in adulthood in areas as diverse as employment, incarceration, and health can be traced to disparities in academic achievement during childhood and adolescence (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

Harsher Punishment for Black Men

America’s public schools have become roadblocks to the graduation of Black men. Schools embody certain factors that hinder the education of Black men, crippling their educational success: low student academic expectations, harsher punishments, and educator bias. Cook et al. (2018) investigated discipline disparities among African American male students, using the Greet-Stop-Prompt technique to examine the correlation between discipline disparities and school connection (Cook et al., 2018). It was suggested that Black male students had 3.6 times more office referrals than White students and from the same teachers as other ethnic groups. Teachers consistently sent African American men to the office with referrals, creating

implicit bias (Cook et al., 2018). These findings support the argument that teachers need diversity and classroom management training while African American men suffer from inadequacies (Cook et al., 2018). Vega et al. (2015) observed barriers that prevent African American and Latino high school students from having positive educational experiences. Using a qualitative study to research students' views about the obstacles they face that prevent them from being successful, students shared their personal opinions and what they experienced in school. Research shows school discipline procedures disproportionately affect students of color (Anyon et al., 2017). In a critical race theory (CRT) analysis, scholars suggest that racial inequities differ among school sub-contexts, where implicit bias in student behavior perceptions may be more relevant in bathrooms and hallways compared to the classroom (Anyon et al., 2017). This study examined the association between student race and the places where adolescents are disciplined using administrative data from a big metropolitan school district (n = 20,166 discipline episodes, 9,170 students, and 185 schools). Black, Latino, and multiracial adolescents were more likely than White students to have an outside-the-classroom discipline event. The data implies systemic bias color, blind policies, and practices contribute to punishment inequalities (Anyon et al., 2017).

Black and Latino students identified barriers to their success to be teachers, school counselors, peers, school policy, and neighborhood safety (Vega et al., 2015). Black male adolescent students have a low perception of their academic ability, and they do not have the motivation to perform because they believed that their teachers have low expectations of their success (Martin et al., 2007). Practices in schools and classrooms indicate low expectations from teachers (Hampton, 2007). The practices include: (a) sitting Black men students closer to teachers to control their behavior and watch them, (b) allowing Black men less time to respond

to questions, (c) giving them less personal attention than White students during instruction time and providing limited amounts of feedback, and (d) not providing opportunities to participate in class discussion and demonstrations (Bailey, 2003). In addition to drugs and weapons, schools now have a broader array of zero-tolerance policies (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Some schools have implemented automatic suspension and expulsion for offenses such as tardiness, absenteeism, disrespect, and disobedience (Smith, 2009).

When children attend school, racial inequities in school readiness exist, indicating that inequalities outside of schools play a significant role (Downey et al., 2009). Studies in this line concentrate on family and community effects ranging from economic inequality (Berends et al., 2008), to noncognitive skills (Grissmer & Eiseman, 2008), and parental incarceration (Grissmer & Eiseman, 2008; Wildeman, 2009). These effects may be amplified when they are concentrated in particular schools and neighborhoods (Condron et al., 2013).

Student opposition to education is a second alleged factor. According to the highly discussed oppositional culture model, minority pupils believe their schools to be dominated by White students, causing ambivalence about achievement and disengagement with school (Morris & Perry, 2016). Another explanation concentrates on schooling itself. Condron (2009) suggested that factors outside of school explain learning inequalities by socioeconomic class but not by race in and of itself. Educators need to know how students feel about their educational experiences since they are vital in transforming student lives. Certain characteristics of predominantly minority schools, such as per-pupil spending (Condron & Roscigno, 2003), teaching experience (Corcoran & Evans, 2008), and school-level poverty, reduce student achievement, according to related research (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

The low academic outcomes of African American students in the current literature are consistent with studies from well over 50 years ago. The numbers have doubled in the United States since the 1970s, with Black students being three times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Since 1974, the number of suspended students nearly doubled, from 1.7 million to 3.1 million, as a result of the presence of police officers in public schools (Wald & Losen, 2003). From 1972 to 2000, the annual percentage of White students suspended for more than one day rose from 3.1% to 5.9% (Wald & Losen, 2003). According to the Office of Civil Rights in 2000, the percentage of Black students suspended increased from 6.0% to 13.2% during the same time frame (Wald & Losen, 2003). Researchers have observed a disproportionate rate of school discipline for students of color for over 25 years (Skiba et al., 2014). According to national and state-level data (Yang et al., 2018), Black kids are two to three times more likely than White kids to experience an expulsion as discipline for subjective events, low-level offenses like disruption and defiance according to national and state-level data (Yang et al., 2018). Students who were suspended were more likely to be retained, and they eventually dropped out of school entirely, as revealed by research from the Education Department's Office of Civil Rights (Nelson & Lind, 2015). An analysis by the Department of Education revealed data from the Southern Poverty Law Center showing that less than 4% of students were suspended in 1973 (Nelson & Lind, 2015).

Recent studies have explained the disparities that still exist in the United States' public education system. Black men’s account for 59% of the high school graduation rate, while 80% of White men are graduating (Grace & Nelson, 2018). The Anti-Defamation League (2015) found that a disparity begins in preschool, with 48% of preschoolers being suspended. Payne et al. (2017) conducted a study that revealed a correlation between school discipline policies and

suspensions. A study in Texas found that 97% of school suspensions are done at the discretion of administrators, and only 3% of the students suspended committed infractions that warranted suspension (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Nelson and Lind (2015) also discovered that profanity was responsible for 51% of insubordination and 57% of suspensions of Black pupils. Discretionary infractions include insubordination and willful defiance, meaning any behavior the teacher deems disrupts classroom instruction (Nelson & Lind, 2015). In California, 40% of all suspensions were due to insubordination, defined as a student challenging authority (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Profanity was the cause of 51% of Black students' suspensions, and 57% of students were suspended for insubordination (Nelson & Lind, 2015).

Infractions range from tardiness, absences, disrespect, and noncompliance. None of these infractions are violent and may be traced back to situations beyond the student's control. However, their rate of punitive discipline has increased. These infractions are governed by zero-tolerance policies and can be viewed as situations that warrant corrective disciplinary action, which leaves the punishment of students to the discretion of teachers and administrators.

The following incidents were described in an article by Nancy A. Heitzeg in 2009:

- A 9-year-old, while on the way to school, found a manicure set. The student had a 1" knife; the student had it on campus and, as a result, was suspended for 1 day.
- A 12-year-old student diagnosed with hyperactive disorder told students not to eat all the potatoes at lunch or he was going to eat them. He was sent to the office and suspended for 2 days. A referral was made to the Ponchatoula, Louisiana, police department, and he was arrested for making terroristic threats.

- In Queens, New York, a 5-year-old boy had a tantrum and, while doing so, knocked some papers off the principal's desk. The student was handcuffed and taken to a psychiatric hospital.
- A 5-year-old girl was taken into police custody for having a temper tantrum and disrupting class.
- An 11-year-old girl in Orlando, Florida was arrested and charged with battery on a security officer. During that incident, the student disrupted a school function and pushed another student.

These incidents show parallels that can still be seen in today's public school system. For example, in 2014, a study conducted by the Department of Justice reported only 15% of men and women Black students contributed to the national student enrollment; however, they represented 35% of out-of-school suspensions and 36% of the nation's expulsions (Grace & Nelson, 2018). The Department of Justice also found that suspended students were twice as likely to drop out of school than those who were not (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Grace and Nelson (2018) reported that in Louisiana, Black men graduation rates were 53%, while the state's overall rate was 72.3%, on average 20% lower. Data from the Office of Special Education revealed that 50% of students with disabilities are incarcerated (Moreno, 2021). Black students are victimized the most and diagnosed by the perceptions of others, contributing to the disproportionality (Moreno, 2021). Black students labeled with learning disabilities face increased chances of being filtered through the criminal justice system (Mowen & Brent, 2016).

School to Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the adoption of zero-tolerance policies in public schools (Ruiz, 2016). "Zero tolerance" policies were

designed to target and rectify disciplinary infractions in public schools. Economically disadvantaged students, African American students, students with disabilities, and men students are placed on the STPP trajectory more than any other population and are subjected to suspension, expulsion, and arrest (Ruiz, 2016). African American and Latino students are disproportionately sent through the STPP, experiencing a loss of academic instruction (Jones et al., 2018). Students who receive harsh discipline that includes suspension, expulsion, and arrest are three times more likely to become involved in criminal activity, making them subject to the criminal justice system (Jones et al., 2018).

Unveiling the systematic racism in our education system is revealed in some statistics provided by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and other researchers. The Office of Civil Rights reported that in 2011–2012, 20% of Black men were suspended (Welsh & Little, 2018). Also, students with disabilities are overrepresented on the STPP; students with emotional and learning disabilities are more than their nondisabled peers. They comprise 12% of the student population, but they make up 25% of the students referred to law enforcement (Hill, 2017). Students with disabilities represent 35%-75% of the students in the juvenile justice system. During 2015–2016, law enforcement officers physically or mechanically restrained 8,600 students. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the restrained students had disabilities, while students with disabilities make up 12% of the student population, which shows the intersectionality of race and disability. As a result of the data, schoolteachers, administrations, and resource officers feed the STPP. According to Sussman (2018), schools were lynchpins for African American students who connected to the STPP. The Office of Special Education released data that revealed 50% of students with disabilities are incarcerated (Moreno, 2021). Black students are those who are victimized the most and diagnosed by their perceptions of others rather than by biology and their

contributions to disproportionality (Moreno, 2021). Black students labeled with learning disabilities face increased chances of being expelled, receiving harsher punishments, and being placed in segregated classes with greater chances of being funneled through the criminal justice system (Mowen & Brent, 2016).

Low Academic Expectations for Black Men

African American men students are perceived negatively by teachers. Research compiled in the ASHE Higher Education Report (2014) revealed that ninth-grade young black men are viewed more negatively than other students. Negative presumptions can lead to Black men being removed from the educational setting, causing them to lose instruction time (Slaten et al., 2016).

Teachers are making it difficult for Black men to keep up with the class and learn new content, putting them at a disadvantage (Allen, 2015). Not only does perception matter, but it is also a critical factor in the trajectory of African American men with disabilities (Hill, 2017). Teacher ideologies are that Black men lack the academic interest, parental support, language, and cultural capital to be successful; having a disability only makes matters worse (Allen, 2015). Unfortunately, African American men are subject to those ideologies as early as preschool, creating barriers to their success (Hill, 2017).

As a result of implicit biases, educators have lower expectations of Black men students with disabilities. Classroom teachers believe students cannot be academically successful with a rigorous curriculum because of their intellectual ability (Gatlin & Wilson, 2016). Caldas and Cornigans (2015) found that the lack of academic success among African American men was in part a result of the absence of enriching educational opportunities, which led to Black men becoming at-risk students who were placed in special education. Lowered expectations could result in Black men acting out and being labeled as troublemakers, leaving teachers feeling

justified in their negative perceptions (Slaten et al., 2016). Perceptions are often based on students' current performance or situation, not their potential. When programs have a lack of high expectations for student achievement regarding a particular culture, students are then viewed stereotypically according to what makes up their community versus how they can impact their community and our world by being educated (Semple, 2013).

Educators struggle with their views that result from stereotypes that affect interactions between students and educators. Teachers did not focus on how to accommodate the student's disabilities; they concentrate on their dominant stereotypes (Banks, 2015). Educators' lack of action presents inequalities and barriers that influence African American men with disabilities opportunities to continue postsecondary studies (Valentine-Cobb, 2017).

Valentine-Cobb (2017) gave voice to 18 to 24-year-old African American men college students who recalled their preparation and transition to college. Data were collected from participants (i.e., seven Black men). They answered questions regarding influential decisions made to attend college, how they were prepared, and the characteristics of a pathway to college. The results showed that Black men students face inequalities and barriers that influence their opportunities to continue school after graduation, experiencing differential treatment from their teachers and how they are perceived by society (Valentine-Cobb, 2017).

African American parents with young men in special education programs require admission review and dismissal meetings for transition from high school, as mandated by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (Rabren & Evans, 2016). The individual education plan (IEP) process can be soul-destroying to watch the IEP become nothing more than sheets of paper on a teacher's desk (Hetherington et al., 2010). Transition planning requires the collaboration of teachers, students, and education professionals (Hetherington et al., 2010). Research indicates

that IEP facilitators, teachers, and diagnosticians prioritize legal compliance above parent and student participation during IEP meetings (Bray & Russell, 2016). As parents experience and navigate the legal jargon, their power of conversation in the meetings can be diminished, leaving them to conform to the recommendations of the IEP committee (Bray & Russell, 2016). As parents experience and try to understand the terms and acronyms in IEP meetings, their power to converse in the meetings can be diminished, leaving them to agree to the recommendations of the IEP committee. Parents feel unprepared to effectively navigate the system and advocate for their students (Rabren & Evans, 2016). A communication barrier exists between parents and education professionals, leaving parents unable to dialogue, ask questions, and take advantage of resources (Wilson, 2015).

Students With Learning Disabilities

More than 50 years after the desegregation decision of *Brown v. Board of Education in* 1954, special education has become an avenue to segregate students (Banks, 2017). In general education classes, 77% of African American pupils were excluded due to alleged intellectual, psychological, and cultural deficiencies (Banks, 2017). In 1979, a judge ruled to support the claim that African American students were overrepresented in the special education population in *Larry P. v. Riles* (Banks, 2017). The disproportionate number of Black men students in special education posed a potential violation of education equality for all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides inclusion for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Banks, 2015).

America has progressed from segregated schools with the help of the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education case, which made racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional (Brown, 2015). Changes continued to be made with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(NCLB). The court case provided equal educational opportunities for students who were from low-income families and students who had been marginalized and underserved (Ford & Russo, 2016). Several changes were made to the educational system with the passing of the NCLB Act. Schools had to provide students with highly qualified teachers and were required to provide adequate yearly progress (AYP). However, students were still left behind (Mitchem et al., 2013).

NCLB was designed to close the achievement gap, but since its implementation, the gap has widened (Walker, 2014). The Glossary of Education Reform defines the achievement gap as a persistent disparity in academic performance (Education Reform, 2013). Several factors need to be understood to correct the educational inequality in our nation (Baber, 2012). African American men have been overrepresented in special education programs, which illustrates the racial disparities that reveal the educational inequality that still exists in our nation (Skiba et al., 2008). Black men are the minority in education but have consistently been added to special education programs over the last 5 years, which indicates this trend is not being addressed (Zhang et al., 2014). Special education representation for other minority groups has decreased; however, McKenna (2013) stated there is a constant rate of African American men.

African American students make up more than 26% of the students in special education classrooms and make up 17.13% of the total student body in public schools (Banks, 2017). In 2006, African American men accounted for 12% of students with learning disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Once African American men are labeled, special education students are less likely to exit the program than their European counterparts and show lower achievement (Banks, 2017). To deter students with disabilities from being educationally discriminated against, the federal government implemented the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA; Banks & Hughes, 2013).

Black students with disabilities reflect different dynamics in our research world. Learning disabilities were first recognized in 1975 by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EACHA; Pullen, 2016). Their diversity and complexity can lead to social injustices and inequalities (Ingham, 2018). African American men students with learning disabilities are characterized as having "double consciousness" (Banks & Hughes, 2013). Students are subjected to schools that primarily teach through socialization and cultural norms, while cultural differences have been ignored (Banks & Hughes, 2013). Educational leaders need thoughtful insight into transitioning African American men with learning disabilities from high school to postsecondary schools or careers (Wadlington et al., 2017). To deter students with disabilities from being educationally discriminated against, the federal government implemented the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA; Banks & Hughes, 2013). When educators and administrators understand that it is their responsibility to promote college-ready individuals regardless of their ability or disability (Mayes et al., 2019). Students are encouraged to attend postsecondary institutions because the most valuable skill in our global economy is knowledge (Thoma et al., 2012).

Education reforms have attempted to address the achievement gap among ethnic groups. Black men are the most academically marginalized group in the public education system (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2014). When race and disability intersect, the lives of African American men with learning disabilities are changed. The limited education of African American men with disabilities impacts the nation's economy and safety. They have a much lesser opportunity for gainful employment (Kaye, 2010). African American men with disabilities account for 20 to 60% of Americans on welfare, resulting in lost revenue in the United States (Banks, 2014). Black and brown individuals with disabilities are confronted with excessive

disciplinary actions and are disproportionately processed through the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Aronson & Boveda, 2017).

IEP Meeting

The placement section of an IEP outlines where and with whom a student will be educated. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) both required extensive parental participation in all aspects of educational programming for students receiving special education services (Fish, 2008). IDEA was designed so that schools and parents can share the responsibility of ensuring that special education students have equitable education opportunities (Fish, 2008). IEP is a document that outlines the student's educational needs, goals, objectives, placement, evaluation requirements, current levels of academic achievement, program length, and modifications or accommodations for qualified learners with disabilities (Fish, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) establishes the legal basis and structure for providing students with disabilities with a free, appropriate public education that meets their specific individual requirements (Yell & Crockett, 2011). IDEA has prioritized integrating IEPs with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 to address the academic, behavioral, and functional needs of students with disabilities (Gartin & Murdick, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

> Each IEP must include information on the student’s current levels of academic and functional performance, annual goals that serve to focus special education interventions, a plan for monitoring progress toward these goals, detailed information on the services and supports provided to the student, and a description of the extent to which the student will participate in general education classes. (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014, p. 2)

IEPs also have to include dates for service delivery, their frequency, length, and location, as well as a statement outlining how parents will be informed regularly about their student's development toward achieving the yearly goals (Walsh et al., 2014).

An IEP is a contract between schools, students, and parents/guardians who have students with disabilities. It is the anchor of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Bateman, 2017). Each year, parents, students, teachers, and school administrators work together to create IEPs to accommodate students with related services and supplemental aids (Bray & Russell, 2016).

It is necessary that parents and educators communicate to design a plan that helps students achieve their academic goals.

> The aim of the IEP process was to ensure that educators and parents are involved in collaboratively creating a formalized plan for instruction that will address unique students' needs. However, the IEP process has created unintended consequences such as depersonalized meetings and a focus on paperwork and compliance rather than collaboration with parents. (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013, p. 373)

Fishman and Nickerson (2014) believed parents of special education students face more obstacles to parental involvement than parents of general education students. Research identifies factors influencing parents' motivation to become involved in their students' home and school activities. Garcia (2004) and Morris and Taylor (1998) conducted studies that revealed teachers' attitudes influenced parent involvement. Classroom structure, school procedures, and communication were other variables identified by Mannan and Blackwell that affected parent involvement. The Hover-Dempsey and Sandler model did not include all the influencing variables; it gave an interactional framework to explore parents' involvement regarding the

decision during admission review and dismissal (ARD) meetings (Hirano et al., 2016). Barriers parents of students with disabilities encounter have not been studied using the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, indicating that further exploration is needed.

Transition Plan

IDEA mandates schools provide transition services to students in special education by age 16 (IDEA 34 CFR 300.320 (b) (c)). IDEA 34 CFR 300.43(a) requires that transition services encompass the development of academic and functional skills to ensure continuing opportunity and achievement following high school graduation, in accordance with the postsecondary transition goals of the student. IEP committees develop postsecondary transition goals addressing academic, social, and emotional skills, student progress toward postsecondary transition goals, and connecting school and community-based services and support to assist students in attaining their postsecondary transition goals (IDEA 34 CFR 300.43(a); Mazzotti et al., 2009). Shedding light on systems that have oppressed Black men with learning disabilities is a relentless journey. Advocating for people who have been broken and do not understand the system that changes the trajectory of their lives requires persistence. There is a need to enhance the transitional services children receive after graduating from high school as more African American men students with disabilities enroll in college (Walker & Test, 2011).

If Black men's goals, strengths, and aspirations are not articulated during IEP meetings, their inability to be successful incapacitates not only our communities but our global society as well. Without adequate support and accommodations, African American men with disabilities are not allowed the opportunity to obtain a postsecondary education (Rabren & Evans, 2016). Parents of students with disabilities identify challenges that impact their students' transition from high school to postsecondary school and careers. Davies and Beamish (2009) reported that

parents of students with disabilities lack support from transition services, making them fearful. As a result, parents feel unprepared to help their students with disabilities successfully transition to postsecondary environments.

Transition Planning for Black Men

Exploring the transitional experiences of African American men with disabilities is necessary to understand the educational challenges this population of students encounters (Banks, 2014). Henderson (2001) found that 72% of the students were European Americans, while only 9% were African American students with disabilities. Research is needed to improve the academic success and transition of African American men with disabilities (Valentine-Cobb, 2017). Concentrating on the difficulties men students experience with the complexity of race, culture, and disability is involved (Banks, 2017). Transitional services are pivotal for African American men with disabilities to attend colleges of their choice, and knowing the factors that hinder college transition for students with disabilities is essential (Banks, 2014).

Policymakers and educators agree that it is necessary for students as well as parents to engage in person-centered IEP and transition planning (Cavendish & Connor, 2017). African American men with disabilities need to share their experiences during these meetings. Cavendish and Connor (2017) found that participants suggested that IEPs and transition meetings were focused on complying with the law instead of meeting student needs. When meetings are conducted with African American men with disabilities, facilitators are reported to encourage students to pursue full-time employment instead of college (Harris et al., 2017). During transition meetings, parents and students are unaware of the services they are eligible for at the postsecondary level. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of parents of high school students with learning impairments (LD) and intellectual disabilities did not know what a transition plan was, and 63%

could not identify any legal requirements regarding postsecondary transitions (Cavendish & Connor, 2017). Inadequate transition meetings can be factors that change the educational path for Black men with disabilities. African American students with disabilities were enrolled in vocational courses even when they expressed their intentions to attend college (Trainor, 2005).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was at the forefront in the 1970s, when racial equality staggered after the 1960 Civil Rights Movement. Derrick Bell, Allen Freeman, and Richard Delgado were scholars in the 1970s who became frustrated with the pace of racial reform (Ladson-Billings, 1998), much like the growing concerns of many Americans today. It seemed that America had made leaps and bounds in race relations, but we are left with the harsh reality that America has not come far enough. It is evident in the killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children. Racial injustices are occurring as audiences watch and beg for the life of George Floyd. He ultimately died in the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota, after being pinned down by a White police officer with his knee on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. African Americans are still singing and marching to the tune of "We Shall Overcome." Derrick Bell said, "It appears that my worst fears have been realized; we have made progress in everything, yet nothing has changed" (Bell, 2008, p. 22.). Ladson-Billings (1998) contended that there is a bond that connects laws, policies, and regulations to power. Critical race theorists' insight that racism is widespread, much of which has to do with U.S. laws and society (Meghji, 2022). CRT is significant to separate the fiction and what is actually being played out in the U.S. political arena after the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the subsequent legislation, involving all three branches of government (Carbado, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

CRT connects different aspects of data related to race and racism. CRT is a conceptual tool to help researchers explain racial inequalities in social, economic, judicial, and educational systems. A lot of our national dialogue about CRT revolves around the education of our students. CRT, when given the opportunity, can be the bridge that allows an understanding of how ostensibly race-neutral structures are prevalent in education (Roithmayr, 2004). The racial limits of White supremacy and racism are formed and enforced through knowledge, truth, merit, impartiality, and high education (Roithmayr, 2019). Ladson-Billings and Tate presented the theory in 1995 as an analysis of educational systems to hear the voices of people silenced in public education. In an educational setting, CRT looks at the way race, racism, and power play a role in curriculum, instruction, student learning, and student experiences (Miller, 2018). CRT acts as a framework that examines interpersonal facets of education that systematically oppress students of color (Shimomura, 2015).

CRT in education, Ledesma and Calderón (2015) stated that CRT is divided into two categories K-12 and higher education. Ladson-Billings and Tate presented the theory in 1995 as an analysis of education systems to hear the voices of people silenced in the education system. In educational settings, CRT looks at the way race, racism, and power play a role in curriculum, instruction, student learning, and student experiences (Miller, 2018). CRT acts as a framework that examines interpersonal facets of education that systematically oppress students of color (Shimomura, 2015). Secada (1989) argued that CRT had been used to segregate by color. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) analyzed micro-aggression and campus climate using CRT as a framework for the study. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) and in 2008, Howard used CRT to study academic achievement, race, and gender (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Chapman (2011) used CRT in education to examine the segregation of students by color. CRT has also been used to explore race and teacher pedagogy by Ladson-Billings (1998), Lynn (2006), and Parker and Stovall (2004). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) analyzed micro-aggression and campus climate, employing CRT as a framework. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) and in 2008, Howard used CRT to study academic achievement, race, and gender (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). CRT has been used to understand how race intersects with gender, class, and disability. Lynn (2006) used CRT to examine racial inequalities, pedagogy, and practice in K-12 education.

Duncan (2002) used CRT to explore the social conditions of African American men in schools that were integrated. The study analyzed how Black men were placed in a school that was respected for its supportive and caring atmosphere. Duncan found contradictions in schools for Black men, feelings of being inadequate, and low levels of student performance for Black men and other marginalized students (Lynn, 2006). Cheryl Harris, in 1983, began to describe how race became a factor of any quality in public schools (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). CRT derives from several different disciplines. Those disciplines are civil rights, ethnic studies, feminist epistemologies, gender studies, and critical legal studies (Collins, 2022). These disciplines are used to understand the relationship between race and power.

CRT was used in this study to examine how its components are anchored in the public education system and how it directly affects Black men and have a front-row seat in our society. We live in a highly racialized society, beginning when Africans were forcibly extradited to America (Lac, 2017). CRT is necessary to understand the influence of racism on educational policies by directly addressing social, political, and historical ideologies (Busey & Coleman-King, 2023; Wun, 2022). Raising the critical awareness of the people that are oppressed in our

education system can help us understand boundaries that contribute to inequality and injustice. Carbado (2010) outlines the following characteristics of CRT:

- CRT rejects the standard racial progress narrative in the history of race relations in the United States.
- CRT changes the narrative of color blindness and color consciousness. Race is socially constructed and examines the role of the law in the construction of race, including witnesses.
- CRT racism is a structural phenomenon that is derived from the failure of individuals and institutions to treat people the same.
- CRT racism is an epidemic.
- CRT racism interacts with many other social forces in society."
- Status quo arrangements are not a natural result of an individual's hard work and merit.
- CRT exposes the intergenerational factors of racial compensation for oppressed individuals (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018).

The following are characteristics of CRT as it relates to education:

- Racial inequality is a logical outcome of the system that is based on achievement and competition.
- Indicts educational policies and how educational practices are constructed by racial inequality and the perpetuation of normal witnesses.
- Rejects historicism, but it does examine the historical links that exist between contemporary inequality and patterns of racial oppression throughout history.

- Provides a framework to look at how the intersection of race with gender, class, sexuality, linguistic background, and citizenship status to analyze how race interacts with these identifiers (Collins, 2022).
- Advocates for meaningful outcomes to redress racial inequalities in education (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018).

This study used storytelling to analyze qualitative data to illustrate the characteristics of race and social/racial injustices in our education system. CRT demonstrated how our society is designed to protect White privilege and devalue oppressed people. CRT was also used to reveal the educational inequalities, experiences, and outcomes and bring to the forefront how Black men with learning disabilities are disregarded in the ARD process during transition meetings.

CRT was the framework to emphasize the complexity of race in the educational environment. CRT offers insights, perspectives, techniques, and pedagogies to help identify, analyze, and alter the structural and cultural aspects of education that support dominant and subordinate racial/ethnic views both inside and outside of the classroom (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Public school administrators, teachers, counselors, and mentors would benefit from knowing how and who preparation is needed for Black men students transitioning to postsecondary studies. Students with learning disabilities are being afforded the opportunity to access post-secondary education on the surface; however, there is a not-so-obscure element that influences their exclusion. Leaving students with disabilities in a system they are not truly integrated into will, unfortunately, eliminate them through systematic oppression.

Summary

There is a significant gap in the literature that explores the experiences of parents of African Americans of men with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education (Bray &

Russell, 2016). Parents of Black men with disabilities voices need to be heard to racially change the perceptions, values, and functionality in American society. Research indicates that IEP facilitators, teachers, and diagnosticians prioritize legal compliance above parent and student participation during IEP meetings. As parents experience and navigate the legal jargon, their power of conversation in the meetings can be diminished, leaving them to accept the recommendations of the IEP committee.

Chapter 3: Research Method

To gain a better understanding of educational inequalities, I needed to examine the experiences of Black men in the public education system. Schools have not been created to perpetuate inequality for Black students nor provide a pathway to the nation's prison system. Questionable discipline patterns cause African American men to be dehumanized, resulting in poor academic performance and negative educational experiences (Fabelo et al., 2011). Changing the negative educational experiences of Black men in the public school system starts with having authentic conversations regarding students' goals, dreams, and desires. All parents and students are unique; getting to know their views is essential to providing postsecondary education opportunities for Black men with learning disabilities. The purpose of this phenomenological study investigates the parent experiences of Black men with learning disabilities so that parents have authentic conversations during ARD meetings. Chapter 3 includes the research design, context, setting, instrumentation, data collection, trustworthiness, researcher's role, researcher bias, limitations, and delimitation of the study.

Research Design and Method

This phenomenological study explores the dialogue in ARD meetings with parents of Black men with learning disabilities transitioning from high school. Phenomenology is an umbrella term for a wide range of philosophies, which can be categorized as existentialism, hermeneutics, and transcendentalism, as some examples of the theories (Cilesiz, 2009). Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that focuses on how one's experiences have become conscious (Gill, 2014). It is a methodological framework that has evolved into a process that seeks reality in the narratives of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). It also uses the data, which is words and not numbers, to describe the

actions and behaviors to provide the researcher with a “thick rich” understanding of the participants' knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings (Roberts, 2010). The methodological framework of phenomenology has developed over time.

Phenomenology is the study of people's conscious experiences of their lives and everyday social actions (Schram, 2003). Sanders (1982) defines *phenomenology* as a descriptive research method that gives meaning to our human experiences that are genuinely found in our consciousness. Phenomenological approaches thereby assume that "our feelings are not senseless states of consciousness or psychic facts, but modes to detect the significance of situations, to know what is savory, disgusting, alarming, distressing, lovely, etc." (Gill, 2015). It uses the data, which is words and not numbers, to describe how actions and behaviors will provide readers with a “thick rich” understanding of participants’ knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings (Roberts, 2010). The result of a phenomenological investigation is a "composite" description of the phenomenon's "essence," known as the essential, invariant structure or essence (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

The term “thick description” is frequently credited to Clifford Geertz (2017) and is employed by Lincoln and Guba (Tracy, 2010). This method is intended to facilitate transferability. The thick description refers to providing the data and findings in sufficient depth so that readers can assess the extent to which the findings can help them comprehend other individuals, times, circumstances, or locations. The description conveys the experience that was investigated. After reading the study, I want readers to understand better the experiences of parents of Black men with disabilities transitioning from high school. A phenomenological qualitative research methodology also allows the research to be conducted in “real world” settings (Roberts, 2010), which is an advantage. Using this qualitative research approach gives

voice to the parents, who may find it challenging to articulate their feelings or what something means through well-structured interview questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016).

This method is most appropriate because it gave voice to the parents of Black men with disabilities who may sit silently in ARD meetings. Using a descriptive approach, Black men parents provided insight into their experiences during their students' ARD meetings. It is vital to the trajectory of Black men with learning disabilities to eradicate the classroom-to-prison pipeline and ensure that every student succeeds. I did this by proactively promoting conversations during ARD meetings for African American men with disabilities transitioning from high school (Harrison et al., 2017). The following research question guided this study: What dominant discourse occurs during ARD meetings to marginalize, objectify, and silence parents of Black men students with learning disabilities?

This study used a descriptive approach to examine parents' experiences during ARD meetings with Black men with disabilities transitioning from high school. This study investigates in detail the jargon used during ARD meetings. This qualitative approach focuses on understanding this phenomenon and how people make sense of their life experiences. (Tarnowski, 2015).

Population

The percentage of Texas students served in special education programs increased in 2017–2018 from 9.2% to 9.8%, in 2018–2019 from 2019–2020 to 10.7%, and in 2020–2021 to 11.3% (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2022). In 2020–2021, men in special education programs made up 65.9% of enrollment, while women made up 34.1% (TEA, 2022). Texas enrollment records include student demographic information, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and economic disadvantage, as well as information on student involvement in special programs. Data

on student characteristics and program participation are vital for monitoring educational progress and creating educational programs at all levels of the education system.

Study Sample

Only Black men's parents were chosen for the present study via purposeful sampling of parents who have students who are Black men with learning disabilities in transition planning (i.e., ages 14 to graduation, according to Texas Law). Purposeful sampling is a strategic approach to producing the best data from participants (Leavy, 2017). In qualitative investigations, purposeful sampling is a method frequently used. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the purposeful sampling strategy entails the researcher selecting the participants based on their ability to comprehend the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Through this study, I determined whether the participants had significant experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. The participants have experienced the ARD processes, and their selection is based on their experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Parents were provided a detailed description of the study in the beginning of the process and provided any clarifications they needed during the study. I anticipated that I would reach saturation with between nine and 11 subjects. The parents came from high schools in South Texas located in the Region 4 education service area with different socioeconomic and academic backgrounds. These parents met a specific criterion to participate in the study.

1. Parents must participate in IEP meetings in person, via Zoom, Google Meets, or by phone.
2. Parents must have a young black man with a minimum of one learning disability who is between the age of 14 and graduation.

The first specification was used because a parent must be involved in their student's education to help provide input on the goals and strengths during the ARD meeting.

Materials/Instruments

In qualitative research, instruments will allow participants to share their feelings about a phenomenon (Roberts, 2010). A phenomenologist should conduct in-depth interviews with three to six participants to acquire sufficient data (Gill, 2015). While interviews are the focal point of phenomenological research, document analysis and participant observation approaches can be used in conjunction (Gill, 2015). Interviews are recorded and typed up so researchers can analyze the stories (Gill, 2014).

To procure participants' experiences, semistructured interviews are conducted with open-ended, probing questions, field notes, excerpts from videotapes, electronic communication, a systematic review of ARD documentation, or a combination of these tools were used to collect data. Participants voluntarily submitted ARD documentation to me. The use of these instruments was aligned with the study to give voice to the parents of Black men with learning disabilities transitioning from high school.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Amedeo Giorgi developed a rigorous approach to analysis for phenomenological research methods in psychology. These methods can be used in all areas of psychology, as well as in other human sciences and multidisciplinary fields like health, education, industry, and social work. Giorgi's comprehensive grasp of phenomenology and his creative faithfulness in adopting its methodologies to human science have marked his work (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi has five steps to his existential-phenomenological method.

Step 1: Collect variable data through semistructured interviews. The interview questions are left open-ended in order for participants to express themselves. The researcher wants to know in detail what each interviewee thought and felt during the interview.

Step 2: The researcher examines the entire transcript of the individual interviews to obtain a sense of the participants' descriptions. The goal is to understand the data as a whole so that we can figure out how the pieces fit together later.

Step 3: After reading the entire transcript, the researcher divides it into preliminary "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10), focusing on the issue under investigation. A "meaning unit" is a segment of data that has been identified as a revealing feature of the phenomenon under inquiry. Follow-ups with individuals take place to gather additional information as needed. The researcher looks for missing information in the original transcript and develops interview questions for each participant. Each participant is interviewed for a more detailed description of each detected gap. The interview is transcribed, read through by the researcher, and incorporated into the original meaning unit analysis.

Step 4: Organize and communicate raw data in the language of the discipline by rewriting it in psychological terms so that the value of each unit in the discipline is clear. This results in a transition from daily viewpoint language to language within the psychological perspective employed for analysis.

Step 5: The rewritten measurement units are synthesized into a description of each participant's experience as an overall thematic description representing the phenomenon's structure. The researcher writes a single description for all study participants. (Peoples, 2021, pp. 128–129)

Upon approval from the Abilene Christian University Institutional Research Board (IRB; see Appendix A), participants were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Adhering to the ethical constraint, their identities remained anonymous, and they were given a written explanation of how the research was to be conducted. Participants were made aware that their participation is voluntary, and they had the freedom to leave the study at any time they deemed necessary or if they felt endangered. Data for the analysis were collected from open-ended interview questions, observations, and a focus group while proper interview protocols were followed (Appendix B). The interview were recorded and transcribed for coding. Coding was done to make the information more manageable for the researcher's report (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). In vivo coding was used to analyze participant interviews. The data from the interviews allowed participants to share their feelings and experiences during the ARD meetings. After in vivo coding, I conducted two additional passes using emotion and value coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Lastly, I consolidated the three coding passes into an axial set of codes and conducted one final analysis to generate themes from the data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are essential for the study to produce valid data. I respected the ethical standards to get knowledge and truth from the research study. I protected the confidentiality of participants during and after the study. I have the obligation as a researcher to protect the human participants in the study (Alase, 2017). All participants were informed of their rights and were able to use an alias name. Their identity, school name, and district were changed to protect their identity. At no time was the privacy of any participant compromised. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary. Participants were informed that they could abort the study when and if they deemed it necessary. Participants could refuse to answer any

questions they are not comfortable answering. Participants were also informed there was minimal risk to participating in the study.

The risks may include emotional discomfort created by not feeling as knowledgeable as they should be about their student's disability. A risk may exist when confidential information is disclosed regarding the student's disability or committee members' actions during the ARD meeting. This study is not affiliated with any other group or study, and the people who took part did not know each other and never met within the context of the study.

The benefits may give a voice to the marginalized Black men population who attend public schools and have learning disabilities. I may gather research to understand the barriers that hinder committees in providing effective transition plans during the ARD meetings. Research may also provide authentic conversations that reduce the risk and enhance the potential for Black men to be successful after they transition from high school.

Trustworthiness

The verification process supported the thick rich detailed descriptions provided by member-checking as a validation technique that adds trustworthiness to the study. Participant data and results were given back to participants to verify accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). Transcripts were checked by participants who submitted the information to verify that it is correct. The participants also discussed their interpretations of their experiences and discussed whether or not the conclusions were credible (Peoples, 2021). The study used interview transcripts, feedback from codes, and the author’s report to analyze the collected data. A verification process supported the thick, rich detail description provided by member-checking. Member-checking is a validation technique that adds trustworthiness to the study. Transcribed interviews were given back to participants to verify accuracy (Birt et al., 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions are propositions that are operational for research purposes (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). I assumed the participants understood the questions asked during the surveys and interviews. I assumed they were open and truthful regarding their feelings during the ARD process and have the faculty to meaningfully describe their experiences in the context of an IEP meeting. I did not assume they knew their rights in the IEP meeting.

Limitations

Common factors that could pose limitations to the conclusions of phenomenology studies include sample size, time constraints, and biases (Peoples, 2021). Limitations are considered methodological weaknesses and are out of the researcher's control. The study was not conducted over time, it provides a snapshot of the transitional ARD for African American students transitioning from high school. Another limitation could be that parents do not recall their conversations accurately during IEP meetings.

Delimitations

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), delimitations are factors that are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher to get purposeful data. This study will examine the conversations between parents of Black men with learning disabilities and ARD committee members when constructing IEPs for students transitioning from high school. The study is limited in that it only uses parents of Black men in special education transitioning from high school with a specific learning disability who discuss their overall experiences in the ARD process. I did not analyze the experiences of Black men with specific learning disabilities who also participated in the ARD meetings.

Summary

Phenomenological research methods are used in this study to get a “thick-rich” description of how African American parents feel during the ARD process. I used phenomenology to understand the participants' lived experiences in the study. I sought to give voice to what it is like to experience the phenomenon of the study. Participants were able to discuss their experiences, and they discussed how they felt during the experiences (Peoples, 2021). As a phenomenological researcher, I aim to provide data from this phenomenon as meaningful reality to give knowledge about the ARD process to the educational community. The use of phenomenological research methods may have time limitations, biases, and small sample sizes that pose limitations in the study. However, it is the best method to understand and describe the phenomenon as it presents itself in the lives of individuals (Phillipson et al., 1972). The method is ideal for examining life experiences.

Lawmakers have made policies to provide equal opportunities for all, but the enforcers of the policies have created barriers, specifically for Black men. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, and definitions. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature. Chapter 3 will discuss the study's methodology, while Chapters 4 and 5 provide data collection, analysis and discuss the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Analytic Approach

The qualitative phenomenological study explored the dialogue in ARD meetings with parents of Black men with learning disabilities transitioning from high school. This qualitative research approach gave voice to the parents, who may find it challenging to articulate their feelings or what something means through well-structured interview questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). This method was most appropriate because it will give voice to the parents of Black men with disabilities who may sit silently in ARD meetings. Using a descriptive approach, Black men's parents provided insight into their experiences during their students' ARD meetings. My objective was to identify factors relevant to three research questions, as reflected in 20 interviews with 10 participants; each participant was interviewed twice. Each survey and interview was considered individually in the analysis. Common themes were identified across the data regarding addressing each of the three research questions.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Amedeo Giorgi's five-step approach:

- Step 1: Data were collected through semistructured interviews with open-ended questions.
- Step 2: The researcher examined the entire transcript of the individual interviews to obtain a sense of the participants' descriptions.
- Step 3: After reading the entire transcript, the researcher divides it into preliminary "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10), focusing on the issue under investigation. Each participant was interviewed for a more detailed description of each detected gap. The

researcher read through the transcribed interviews before incorporating them into the original meaning unit analysis.

- Step 4: Organize and communicate raw data in the language of the discipline by rewriting it in psychological terms so that the value of each unit in the discipline is clear.
- Step 5: The rewritten measurement units were synthesized into a description of each participant's experience as an overall thematic description representing the phenomenon's structure. The researcher wrote a single description for all study participants.

Coding was done to make the information more manageable for my report (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). NVivo coding was used to analyze participant interviews. After in vivo coding, I conducted two additional passes using emotion and value coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Lastly, I consolidated the three coding passes into an axial set of codes and conducted one final analysis to generate themes from the data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016; see Appendix D). NVivo was used to help organize the analysis and coding of the data.

The resulting themes are described in the summary of the research findings. The coding process identified the primary themes. The themes were delineated into three areas, with each area focusing on one of the three research questions. The findings for each research question are summarized and examples from the interviews are used to illustrate the themes and subthemes. Tables of the theme frequency and the number of interviewees that mentioned a specific theme are also included.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do Black parents with young men with a specific learning disability perceive the IEP process? The themes related to this research question are summarized

in this section. As reflected in Table 1, there were 11 themes for Research Question 1 (Appendix A).

Table 1

Themes and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 1

Theme	*n* of interviews in which the theme appeared	*n* of times the theme appeared across the data
The child had a difficult time with the diagnosis	7	10
Satisfaction with the IEP process	4	16
Parents understood their rights	2	2
Parents had support and guidance from teachers and others with expertise on the IEP process	8	8
Parents had a difficult time with the diagnosis	7	10
Parents did not understand the IEP process or their rights	7	17
Information about resources and accommodations not provided	10	21
Information about the IEP process was provided	8	8
Goals were established for the child	11	18
The IEP process was difficult	5	10
Other-race staff may not understand what the Black men's needs	2	2

The Child Had a Difficult Time With The Diagnosis

The theme that the child had a difficult time with the diagnosis was associated with the codes of *isolated, embarrassed, discouraged, difficult, and challenging*. For example, in terms of isolation, Angie indicated her son had the following experience:

> His first experiences in special education program wasn't a good one. He felt isolated from his friends, because he was pulled out. And he wasn't very responsive to working with the teacher at the time, until he met someone he could really trust. But he did not want to go into another class when he was younger. He didn't care for... It meant, like I said, separated from his friends, and it felt different. So, he didn't like it.

Ms. Smith described her son feeling embarrassed by his learning issues:

> When I got to the school and I made him read a book to his class, it was just reading the words on the paper wasn't the problem, he could read them fluently. It was comprehending the material that he was reading. And then when I asked him, I was like, "You went through all of this work to get out of reading." And he was like, "Well, she can't tie her shoes so they don't make her. This one doesn't like to add, so they don't make him." And so he went around the room basically pointing out everybody's things and how nobody forces them to do it. So, he was like, "If I just pretended I couldn't do it, they would stop asking me."

Others described their son feeling discouraged by the diagnosis. For example, Sara shared, "So he [her son] felt discouraged because he couldn't control himself, and then the other part of it was initially, we were against medicating him. And so it just put a lot of pressure on him." In other examples, Sara said, "He went through a lot of emotional... What's the word? It affected him emotionally because he felt like he was different than everybody else, so it was like that was a struggle."

Satisfaction With the IEP Process

The theme of satisfaction with the IEP process was associated with the codes of thrived and helped, relieved, knew best, helpful, happy, and addressed concerns. For example, Ashley indicated that her son "thrived and developed greatly with the services that he has been getting with dyslexia, and he gets in-class support with firm inclusion, and he's doing well." After getting support for her, Ashley said she was "a little relieved. I feel like once we got a diagnosis on it, then we were able to start going for getting him help." She further indicated that "I was happy. I feel like we had good goals and plans and set for him to be successful." Regarding the special ed process, Keisha indicated that "the experience was very positive while he was in

junior high." She also indicated that her son "experienced lots of help. They helped him a lot. They did a bunch of pullouts and his grades stayed steady." It should be noted that these sentiments were expressed by only four interviewees.

Parents Understood Their Rights

Parents understood their rights was derived from the codes of understanding and shared rights. This theme was only reflected for two interviewees. When asked if anybody explained her rights during the process. Sarah said:

> Yes. I can remember that being shared. What was shared, I can't tell you, but I know there has been communication around that. Even if it wasn't shared in a meeting, I would've gotten an email with it in writing.

Similarly, Ashley expressed similar sentiments when asked this question. She stated, "I fully understand them. It's a lot to take in, but they are well explained, and I do understand them."

Parents Had Support and Guidance From Teachers and Others With Expertise on the IEP Process

Parents had support and guidance from teachers and others with expertise on the IEP process was derived from the codes of teachers helped, family members helped, diagnostician, and assistant principal. For example, Angie shared:

> Well, since I've started so early in getting my kids, both my kids the help that they need, I did look for someone that knew more about the programs. So, that was a sped teacher that I used to talk to, to kind of get more information on how [inaudible 00:05:26], which was very helpful in explaining to me what was going to happen.

Sara described an assistant principal who supported and guided her during the IEP process:

> Now, there was an assistant principal that actually ended up being an ally for my son, because he absolutely loved my son. And so he took a different position, but the principal was like, “Well, we want him in this meeting, and we're going to tell him all of the bad things, all of the challenges that the teachers are seeing,” which is nothing different from what has been in the past. You're going to talk about him being unfocused. You're going to talk about him being disorganized. You're going to talk about him struggling to finish his work, and so you've got to reinforce that. So no different conversation than the past, so my response, after she said that, my response to her was, “Well, let me be very clear. If there's anything that's going to be communicated to Roderick.” I said, “I need you guys to communicate to me, and no, we're not going to do a round table of you guys shooting, firing at him concerning these things that you guys said, ‘Hey, these are behaviors that we don't like.’” I said, “These are behaviors that goes along with the disease.”

Ms. Smith mentioned support from a diagnostician:

> The diagnostician that did the assessment and stuff, we had a personal, not a personal, but a co-work situation. We worked together within the district. So, I was nervous about my first meeting, but I didn't expect it to be that bad. So she had called and she's like, “What happened?” I said, “You know, you couldn't tell me whether you were going to push in the support or whether or not you were going to pull him out or what it was going to look like. And this person was saying that you would move him and help him basically all day. And then that person was saying, you could do this in smaller chunks. And I don't know what's going on at this point.” And she said that she did understand from my point of view too, because she's like, I didn't feel like the answers people were giving you were

> really good. And I was like, “And then I work with all of you guys, so if you can't answer my questions, what about a parent coming in off the street?”

In a final example of this theme, Kandace said, “In the beginning of my ARD journey, I relied a lot on, uh, a family member who was in, uh, who was in education and was, uh, at one point in their life, a diagnostician.”

Parents Had a Difficult Time With the Diagnosis

Parents had a difficult time with the diagnosis associated with the codes of nervous, guilt, denial, anxious, and apprehensive. Regarding the special education process, Ashley explained:

> I was kind of nervous about what his, I guess diagnosis would be. I was a little shocked. I didn't expect him to be dyslexic. He never showed any obvious signs that would make me think that he would possibly be dyslexic, so I was a little shocked initially, but I was just a little nervous overall.

Jane described being anxious about the diagnosis and when she was told they were giving him a label as in Special Ed:

> At first, I really didn't want that because not really understanding, because we know as you get older, certain labels keep you from being able to do certain things if you would ever want to enlist in services or just certain careers that you may want to endeavor. And as you get older, if you have certain labels, you can't.

When her son was diagnosed, Angie shared, “At first, it was kind of... I thought, what did I do wrong to not help him? And I felt a little guilt from my end.” Linda indicated she was in denial about her son’s diagnosis:

> Well, at first, we was in denial that he didn't have a disability. And then we went to several doctors, and the last doctor that we went to confirmed [inaudible 00:02:15] at age

> three, and we went from there. And we put him in the RS school to make sure that he was capable of doing things because he wasn't capable of doing the things that he needed to do. So, we had to put him in a different type of educational setting.

Parents Did Not Understand the IEP Process or Their Rights

The theme of parents did not understand the IEP process, or their rights was associated with the codes of no knowledge, didn't know or understand, didn't explain, and confusing. For example, when asked how she understood her rights in the special education program, Jane indicated:

> I was going to say I didn't. Didn't have a lot, lot of knowledge about rights and so forth at that time. I did have a brother who was going through, who was getting his degree and he was learning some things as we went along and some other people who had more knowledge about what they could and could not do.

Jane also shared:

> I really didn't understand what they were talking about. They spoke a language and used words that I were not familiar with before because this was also new to us. Even going to the doctor's appointment, things were not clear in regard to the disability and I had not really did homework or gotten any information, just a lot of information on it.

When asked if she understood the various acronyms that apply to the IEP process, Candace stated:

> I just know IEP, but I don't know... I couldn't tell you right now what it stands for. I just knows it's like an individual... Some kind of plan for my child. And the other acronym, I don't know. Usually, when they would say things, I would have to try to Google it later.

In a final example of this theme, when asked, “Do you understand your rights in the special education process?" Stacy said, “No. Well, I know that as long as he's in school, he has to receive accommodations, but that's all I know.”

Information About Resources and Accommodations Not Provided

The theme of information about resources and accommodations not provided was associated with the codes of not shared, not discussed, and did not know. Regarding the ARD meeting and accommodations, Sara said,

> So, the only acronyms that I remember is the 504 and the individual development plan, the IDP. Any other acronyms? I don't know that I even remember them even being said, but those were the ones that I was concerned about.

When asked, “So, they had not made you aware that sometimes when you take those state mandated tests, that there are accommodations that can be made,” Angie simply said, “No.” Further, when asked, “In making sure all the documentation was done or were they more concerned with your child's future, making sure that he had a clear, um, transition to his next phase,” Angie said, “I think it was more of their documentation of what they needed to have in the meeting.”

Information About the IEP Process Was Provided

The theme information about the IEP process was provided was associated with the codes of provided information, explanations, and acronyms. For example, when asked about her understanding of the acronyms, Angie indicated, “I fully understand them. It's a lot to take in, but they are well explained, and I do understand them.” When asked, “Do they give you a verbal explanation or just the procedural safeguard packet?" Ashley said, “Both verbal and packet.” Keisha indicated that they fully explained the goals and what they would be working on with her

son.” In a final example, when asked if they explained the acronyms and accommodations, Stacy said, “Yeah, she went real in-depth with the explanation.”

Goals Were Established for the Child

The theme goals were established for the child was associated with parents or students had input and no input from parents or students. A larger number of interviewees indicated that there was no input from parents or students as compared to parents or students had input. Angie explained, “The goals were already written... They asked if, if these goals were, you know, to my approval and if I had any questions, and I, I didn't have any questions afterwards. I agree upon 'em.” Ashley mentioned,

> I think we're just mainly focused on his dyslexia and just getting him to work, do his schoolwork. I don't know any of the official goals that are in the ARD, but just mentally, that's what I can say that his goals are.

Candace also indicated that the goals “were already written” when she got to the ARD meeting and that:

> Yeah, the goals were already made as if they had already discussed their process. Well, prior to me, because my child wasn't included in the ARD, so just prior to me joining in on the ARD, it was just kind of like, "This is what it is."

Similarly, Ms. Smith stated:

> I've never really been asked to give input on goals. They always just write them, and they'll be like, “Do you agree with them?” I guess at any point I could say no, and they might modify it or do something, but it's not like anybody asked me what my thoughts were in building this. I've also never gotten a copy. They're supposed to send me.

Sara also shared:

> And to be honest, I don't know that we ever really talked about any of that in the meeting outside of, “What accommodations can we give that's going to help the kid in the moment?” I don't know that there was ever like, “Hey, let's sit down and come up with a vision, a school career vision for your kid.” I don't think that was ever the conversation, because to me, in order to do something like that means that you have to have ownership in a child's school career. Nobody ever had ownership in his school career but us. So no, there was never a clear vision because that requires ownership. And unfortunately, the system is not designed for ownership.

Angie indicated that the ARD committee incorporated her son’s aspirations and that they actually talked to him. So, her son had input. As a parent, Ashley also had input and she explained, “So we're working on his dyslexia, so in order to be successful growing up, he's going to need to learn how to spell correctly, read, correctly things like that.” Jan stated:

> Well, the last few ARDs for the last couple of years we're talking high school. They're talking about his credits, his work. We're having some issues, making sure he's getting all his working because now we're dealing with credits and graduation. So, we've been talking about him actually attending something called an academy, which is school within a school, but he's kind of in that setting for half of the day and it can help him get things done that he's really not getting done so that we're not having the problem of him not getting all his credits so he can graduate.

The IEP Process Was Difficult

The theme dissatisfied with the IEP process was associated with the codes of role of race, not beneficial, no input, no future focus, and didn't do enough. Linda did not feel the ARD was beneficial to her son’s transition and she explained:

> I didn't have any input of writing those goals because they said that they was going to take care of everything and do everything possible for him that he needed. Even if he decided he wanted to go to college, they was going to make sure they do all that and take care of all that. So, I didn't have any input in it and how he supposed to do things.

Ms. Smith indicated:

> You never get what you want. You're always still upset. You're always reliving it to see if I could have said anything different to get a better outcome or what do you have to do to change it? I've never walked out of one feeling like I accomplished what I've set in to do.

Sara shared:

> His counselor is supposed to be on this and communicating with the teachers that are within that 504 program, including my son. So, I've had multiple instances where there was absolutely no clue as to what the accommodations were. And God forbid, he switched from middle school to high school or elementary school to middle school. It was total oblivion. We absolutely know nothing, so we've got to start over if I can't produce the paperwork.

This theme was further classified into the subtheme other-race staff may not understand what the Black men's needs. This was expressed by two interviewees. Angie expressed:

> Um, when there was not a male, regardless of color, in the meeting, then I felt like they didn't have an idea what my son would need. Um, I think when there was a male present, then it was more, you know... That person could understand seeing what the needs of my son. But I know when it was just mostly female, I didn't feel comfortable with th- the idea of the ARD because, you know, again, he is a Black male and sometimes other races don't know what Black males need (she laughs) if that makes sense.

Similarly, Sara explained:

> And so even more, I had to advocate and just be that person to boost his confidence because there was no diversity. And not only dealing with the fact of not having the diversity and being a ADHD student, there was certainly issues with race in the school and a lack of protection when it came to race. And so he experienced, in that particular school system, racial slurs, and it happened at least four times from four different young men. And the last conversation that I had with the administration before transitioning out of that area, the administrator told me, "Well, I know we have a diversity issue. If you find training, let me know." So, there was no positioning. So, I can remember distinctively them saying, "Okay, we need to have this meeting for Roderick," and it was so aggressive the way that I was approached. "And we want him to be in the meeting and we're going to tell him all of the things. Every teacher's going to tell him all of the things that he's doing wrong." And so, I allowed... And this was from the principal. From the principal.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: How do parents of young black men labeled with learning disabilities who are transitioning from high school describe their IEP meeting experience? There were eight themes related to this research question which are summarized in this section.

Table 2

Themes and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 2

Theme	*n* of interviews in which the theme appeared	*n* of times the theme appeared across the data
The meeting included discussion of resources and parents provided input	16	42
Students meeting attendance varies	8	10
Students involvement in goal planning varies	9	11
Some parents felt the meeting was beneficial for their son and others did not	16	37
Parents predominantly felt that the IEP meeting did not go well	13	30
Parents felt the IEP meeting was okay	5	11
In some cases, few people of color attended the meeting	7	7
A variety of staff attended the meeting, and parents primarily attend alone without an advocate	10	15

A Variety of Staff Attended the Meeting and Parents Primarily Attend Alone

The theme of a variety of staff attended the meeting and parents primarily attend alone without an advocate was associated with the codes did not use an advocate, parents primarily attend the meeting alone, and various staff attend the meeting. For example, Angie, Jane, Kandace, Keisha. Ms. Smith, Stacy, and Ashley indicated that they never had anyone else attend the ARD meeting with them. In fact, Keisha stated, “Well, I just learned that I could ask others to attend with me. At first, I didn't know about it.” Most indicated that various staff attended the ARD meeting. For example, Angie said,

> I know it was a counselor. It was the special ed. teacher, the diagnostician, and I think he had to be in counseling at the time, so the special education counselor was in the meeting as well, as well as speech pathologist.

Ashley said:

> So, the inclusion teacher is in there, his dyslexia teacher, an assistant principal, the diag, his behavioral person is in there, his teachers, and that's all I can think of off the top of my head, but just anybody that services him.

Jane said, “He had teacher, principal, the person that would deal with behavior, a special ed person, testing like the LSSP or diagnostic person. Who else? The counselor. Me. That's it.”

While various staff attended the meeting and parents mostly attended alone, parents indicated they have never used an advocate. When asked, “Have you ever used an advocate before,” Ashley, Elena, Jane, Kandace, Linda, Ms. Smith, and Stacy said “no.” Jane indicated that she “Didn't know of what that was. Didn't hear of it until later on.” Ms. Smith also said, “I never knew that was an option at the time.”

In Some Cases Few People of Color Attended the Meeting

The theme of in some cases few people of color attended the meeting was associated with the codes few to no people of color attendees and people of color were in the meeting. Jane, Kandace, and Sara indicated they were few to no people of color in the ARD meeting. For example, Sara explained, “In the ARD committee, there were zero people of color. In the administration, the whole administration, there were zero people of color. And when I say people of color, I'm talking about my nationality.” In contrast, Ashley indicated there were people of color people that looked like her in the ARD meeting. Keisha said she was not the only person of color in the meeting.

Parents Felt the IEP Meeting Was Okay

The next theme was parents felt the IEP meeting was okay and reflects that some parent indicated that the ARD meeting was okay or fine. Angie said, “I was comfortable with

everything that was, uh, stated and agreed upon what was gonna be happening to my student, um, after the ARD meeting." Ashley said:

> I had a good experience. We discussed the growth that he has shown, and he has had some tremendous growth behaviorally, academically, even with the dyslexia as well…My concerns were heard and noted…I feel fine with them. I think that they have always been positive, even when we didn't always have a positive output. I think that they've always had a positive feel.

Keisha also expressed satisfaction and noted, "It was fine. We were all sitting around the table. They explained everything that was supposed to happen to him, and how they would proceed in trying to help him with his disability."

Parents Predominantly Felt That the IEP Meeting Did Not Go Well

The theme parents predominantly felt that the IEP meeting did not go well was associated with the codes of *parents did not have a voice or input in the goals*, *staff did not explain certain things well*, and *the meeting was confusing overwhelming or not what was expected*. Angie said that things were not explained during the meeting and:

> I'm not sure why it wasn't. Maybe because it's just overwhelming when things are starting to develop more, I guess with ARD to get. This was so many years ago, when he first got recognized. But it wasn't explained because they didn't know to explain it to the parent. They didn't have the resources to explain the title. Because at the time, it wasn't called ID. And so, the word that they did use, they... yeah.

When asked "were you comfortable and knowledgeable enough to express your concerns and ask questions," Jane explained:

> No. I mean, I say no because you don't know what you don't know. Until you realize you don't know? I mean, it is not like they give you some kind of lead on, do more of this or this will be helpful or it is really none of that guided.
>
> I really didn't understand what they were talking about. They spoke a language and used words that I were not familiar with before because this was also new to us. Even going to the doctor's appointment, things were not clear in regard to the disability and I had not really did homework or gotten any information, just a lot of information on it.

Sarah said no one was helpful to her. Ms. Smith said the meeting was overwhelming and that "I ended up just leaving. We never did finish it, so I just excused myself and [inaudible 00:05:26] I walked out." Stacy stated, "Oh lord, that was long. It was overwhelming at first because it was a lot of information to take in about his condition and all the requirements and accommodations he would receive."

Regarding voice, Angie said, "I don't think many others were... As far as other teachers that were there, they may have said what he was able to do, but I don't think I was able to have a voice as much." Kandace said her role as a parent in the meeting was to "kinda sit back and listen." Keisha said, "They asked me some questions on if I thought that he should have this or that, but as far as input, I didn't have much." Linda shared:

> No, they just was explaining to us what was going on with him at school. They didn't tell us we had a role in it or nothing like that. They just said they just had the meetings like every once a month…It was, we had to just come. So they explained to us, just tell us about his work, his behavior, and that was it.

Ms. Smith described her experience:

> I've never really been asked to give input on goals. They always just write them and they'll be like, “Do you agree with them?” I guess at any point I could say no, and they might modify it or do something, but it's not like anybody asked me what my thoughts were in building this. I've also never gotten a copy. They're supposed to send me a copy of the whole thing a couple days in advance. I've never gotten a copy of that either.

In a final example of this theme. Sara said:

> And to be honest, I don't know that we ever really talked about any of that in the meeting outside of, “What accommodations can we give that's going to help the kid in the moment?” I don't know that there was ever like, “Hey, let's sit down and come up with a vision, a school career vision for your kid.” I don't think that was ever the conversation, because to me, in order to do something like that means that you have to have ownership in a child's school career. Nobody ever had ownership in his school career but us. So no, there was never a clear vision because that requires ownership. And unfortunately, the system is not designed for ownership.

Some Parents Felt the Meeting Was Beneficial for Their Son and Others Did Not

The theme of some parents felt the meeting was beneficial for their sons, and others did not was associated with the codes of the meeting was not beneficial and was beneficial for the child. In terms of the meeting not being beneficial, Jane indicated:

> Probably not, because we didn't talk, plan graduation and career until the summer, or going into 12th or 11th grade. And we started talking about credits and work and making sure you had enough credits. So, it's not like we worked a 4-year plan starting from freshman year. We didn't do that.

Kandace said:

> I don't think they care about my child's future…Uh, I don't think... I don't, well, I just don't think they, uh, feel like his future is important. That he'll just, you know... Like, I- I've even... I asked questions about next steps because, um, he's interested in furthering his education. But, um, they didn't seem, like, that was a thing. So, yeah.

Linda expressed:

> Well, I feel like some of them was concerned, and I feel like some of them was like, "Well, just get him out of here. Let's just get him out of school and we don't have to deal with it anymore. It's life. He's going to be a failure anyway. We're just going to get him through this project while he's in school and do what we're supposed to do while he's here."

Ms. Smith shared:

> They're not preparing him for the real world of real deadlines. He was able to turn in homework whenever he got it in. They always extended things out. Extra time is not a good accommodation because "Do you get extra time at work?" I don't. I'm on a timeline. Things have to be done on time. There's consequences to that, but in that world, there aren't any. So then, he left high school and he failed out of college twice because he really didn't know what he wanted to do for work. He went into college to play ball and he could not hack the classes.

In terms of the meeting being beneficial, Angie explained:

> Um, mainly I- it, it really gave him a idea on what he wanted to do and they were more focused on what he wanted, not most about what I wanted because it was, you know, his transition. Um, they gave him some things to look forward to, um, after he graduated.

Ashley said, “I think he's thrived and developed greatly with the services that he has been getting with dyslexia, and he gets in-class support with firm inclusion, and he's doing well.” Keisha said, “The first one, one of his teachers helped me a lot, and then the DIAC came in, and so she helps a lot with him now.” Sarah shared:

> I've always heard, in any of the ARD meetings that I've gone to for him, that he was very respectful, that he got along well with other children, that he was very helpful to the teacher. So, I would always hear these three things about him. No matter which meeting in his school career that I went to, those things were always communicated about him. And so, the teacher... They went around the table, each teacher shared behaviors, the positive. They also shared what the struggles were, and they gave ideas on maybe something that they could do or said, “Hey, this is what I'm struggling... Is there anybody else that might have an idea?” So, the tone of the meeting was very different from any previous meetings that I had ever had for him because I was very adamant about, “We're not going to do it how you guys are telling me you want to deliver this message. You will not deliver this message this way. Instead, this is how I want the meeting to be ran.” And I was accommodated in those instances.

Students’ Involvement in Goal Planning Varies

The theme of students’ involvement in goal planning varies was associated with the codes of students are not part of goal planning and students are part of goal planning and plans. For example, Candace stated, “No, my child was not involved in the goal-planning process.” Keisha and Stacy said they did not ask their sons about their goals. Linda indicated that “I don't think they did a good job” incorporating her son into the goal planning. In contrast, Jane indicated that “they talked to him about possibly some schools that he could, trade schools he

could go to for welding." In terms of her son's input into goals, Linda explained, "Sometimes, but sometimes he wouldn't. It was all about them explaining to us and telling us this and his behavior and this and that and this and that."

Students' Meeting Attendance Varies

The theme of students' meeting attendance varies and is associated with the codes of students attended meetings, give input, and students do not attend meeting. Kandace said that her child did not attend the ARD meeting because "I just assumed that children were not, uh, allowed to attend the ARD's because that was never an option, uh, given to me." Sara noted, "No, he wasn't in those meetings. He wasn't in those meetings." In contrast, Keisha, Stacy, and Linda indicated that their sons attended meetings and provided input. Linda indicated, "Well, I didn't have him present. They had him present. Yeah, he had to come." Stacy's son attended and advocated for himself, "because old enough to speak for himself, so he should be able to express his feelings about the accommodations that he's getting."

The Meeting Included Discussions for Resources, and Parents Provided Input

The theme of the meeting included discussions for resources, and parents provided input that was associated with the codes of certain staff who provided most of the info and did most of the talking, parents advocate discussed their preferences and concerns for interventions in the meeting, and parents provided input and information during the meeting. In terms of who led the discussion during the ARD meeting, Ashley and Angie noted that "In my ARD meetings, it was mostly the diagnosticians that gave most of the information." Jane stated, "There was the principal, the diag. more so kind of more so the person doing the meetings. I mean answering the questions somewhere." Kandance explained, "There was an ARD... I guess they would be an

ARD facilitator. They just go around and tell everybody when it's their turn to speak kind of thing." However, some parents provided input and discussed their preferences. Angie mentioned:

> I'd say they were willing to listen to certain things, especially because I didn't want my son to be pulled out. I wanted to make sure that they allowed him to at least have... not just in a room by himself. So, I wanted to see if there was others in the room with him.

Ashley indicated that in the meeting her role was to "Bring up any concerns that I have for him. Ask questions about his academics and his growth in the classroom and outside of the classroom as well." Keisha and Ms. Smith mentioned that they were comfortable enough to express concerns and ask questions during the ARD meeting. Keisha noted that "the concerns I've shared, they've been approved. They fixed the situation." Sara explained her input:

> I don't know that I wouldn't say that there was a very targeted discussion around the reason why there were no shifts and changes in the accommodations. If he needed it, so I take that back. So, there has been instances where the feedback from the teachers were, "Oh, we don't see that. We don't see that." But perhaps I was still seeing something at home, right? And so, I would say, "Well, hey, I don't agree with removing that accommodation at the moment. Can we keep it?" And there was never pushback to say, "Well, no, we got to take it off." It was like, "Okay, if Mom feels more comfortable with keeping it, we're going to keep it and let's continue to follow it."

Angie noted:

> As a parent, I think I, at one particular time, just listened to what they were going to do for my son. However, gave my input of what I thought he needed as well. They did ask questions about his home life, so I was able to give them general information about that.

In a final example, Ashley noted that her role in the meeting was to “Bring up any concerns that I have for him. Ask questions about his academics and his growth in the classroom and outside of the classroom as well.” Jane indicated that her role was to “parent. Advocate for him more so.”

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: Do parents of young black men have recommendations of practice for IEP teams based upon their experience? The recommendations parents provided were classified as pertaining to (a) recommendations for parents and (b) recommendations for schools. As reflected in Table 3, there were 14 recommendations for Research Question 3.

Table 3

Themes and Frequencies of Themes for Research Question 3

Theme	*n* of interviews the theme appeared	*n* of times the theme appeared across the data
Recommendations for the school		
Provide more teacher training for working with students who have a disability	1	2
Provide more one-on-one services and accommodations	1	2
Include student input and involve students	3	4
Include more staff input	1	1
Engage in additional planning for the student's transition	5	11
Allow more parental input and involvement	1	2
Recommendations for other parents		
Take a child advocate with you to the meeting	3	3
Request that paperwork be mailed	1	1
Record and document the meeting	1	1
Ensure the child is accommodated as required and in a way that meets their needs and goals	2	2
Keep an open mind	1	1
Get involved and ask questions	6	6
Get FAQS and information before the meeting	5	5
Consult with an expert	2	3

Recommendations for Schools

Participants suggested several recommendations for schools, including increased teacher training for working with disabled students, more one-on-one services and accommodations, involving student input, staff involvement, additional planning for student transition, and allowing more parental involvement.

Recommendations for Other Parents

The next set of recommendations was for other parents. To ensure a successful meeting, bring a child advocate, request paperwork, record the meeting, ensure the child is accommodated according to their needs and goals, maintain an open mind, participate, ask questions, obtain FAQs, and consult with an expert.

Summary

The IEP meeting process is crucial for children with special needs, but it often poses challenges for parents, particularly those of Black children with learning disabilities. Common issues include confusion, a sense of rush, and the feeling that these meetings are more procedural than meaningful. Parents frequently feel overwhelmed by the rapid and complex nature of IEP meetings, leading to confusion and a sense that these sessions are just formalities without substantial dialogue, which leads to parents feeling unheard in IEP meetings. There's a crucial need for more inclusivity, ensuring students’ and parents' perspectives are recognized and integrated into their children's education plans. This chapter included a summary of the data analytic approach, tables summarizing the identified themes, and the frequency of occurrence of the themes across interviewees and across the data. Specific examples of the themes were provided from the interviews.

Chapter 5: Interpretation

In navigating the complex terrain of postsecondary education, African American parents of young men diagnosed with learning disabilities encounter multifaceted challenges. By employing a phenomenological narrative approach, the research explores the lived experiences of these parents, aiming to uncover barriers and opportunities within the IEP process and transition planning. Through rich narratives and deep insights, the investigation improves transition planning processes for this demographic group, recognizing the pivotal role such planning plays in shaping postsecondary outcomes. Chapter 5 summarizes the dissertation by providing the challenges, frustrations, and recommendations of African American parents navigating the educational landscape for their young men with learning disabilities.

Discussion of Key Findings

This research aims to investigate the challenges faced by African American parents with young men diagnosed with learning disabilities during the transition to postsecondary education. The research seeks to provide a factual account of these parents' experiences but also wants to offer a platform for their voices to be heard and understood. By employing a phenomenological narrative approach, the study seeks to illuminate the barriers encountered by these parents and explore potential avenues for enhancing their children's efforts toward higher education (Schuemann, 2014). The major purpose is to improve transition planning processes for this demographic group, recognizing the critical role such planning plays in determining postsecondary outcomes (Trainor et al., 2016).

RQ1: How do Black parents of young men with a specific learning disability perceive the IEP process?

The first research question seeks to uncover the perceptions of Black parents with young men diagnosed with specific learning disabilities regarding the IIEP process. By examining their viewpoints, the study aims to gain insights into parents' experiences and perspectives as they navigate their children's opportunities for secondary education. Parent perceptions impact their students' transition from high school to postsecondary school and careers. This exploration is essential for understanding aspects of the IEP process from the point of view of the parents of Black men with learning disabilities.

Black parents may hold cultural beliefs and values that influence their perspectives on education and disability. These viewpoints impact their involvement in the IEP process, their advocacy for their child, and their interactions with the ARD committee. With the historical injustices and systemic inequalities experienced by Black communities in education, it is crucial to acknowledge how these factors influence the trust and confidence that Black parents have in the education system. Prior experiences with systemic discrimination and marginalization impact how individuals view the IEP process. This study revealed that eight of the 10 parents had negative perceptions regarding the IEP process. The findings of this study corroborate those of a study by Davies and Beamish (2009), which claimed that parents were uneasy about student transition meetings. The study revealed that parents' perceptions surfaced in the coding as anxiety, nervousness, and fear about the IEP process and navigating the educational system. Apprehensions and concerns about being heard, valued, and respected in transition meetings. A key theme from the study, which resonates with the existing literature, is the perception of marginalization and objectification felt by parents of young black men students with disabilities during the IEP process and transition planning (Harrison et al., 2017).

RQ2: How do parents of young black men labeled with learning disabilities who are transitioning from high school describe their IEP meeting experience?

The second research question highlights the firsthand experiences of parents of young black men labeled with learning disabilities as they transition from high school. By capturing the narratives of these parents regarding their experiences in IEP meetings, the study aims to provide a thick rich understanding of the challenges, frustrations, and successes encountered during this pivotal phase of their children's educational journey. Through these narratives, the study aims to shed light on the complexities of the transition process and its implications for postsecondary outcomes. Moreover, the experiences described by participants echo the complexity and frustration encountered in IEP meetings, mirroring the sentiments expressed in prior research (Harrison et al., 2017).

Parents described a mixture of emotions when dealing with their child's IEP, their emotions ranged from apprehension to frustration, according to the codes lifted from their interviews. Recognizing parents' emotional responses is vital in IEP meetings. Their confusion, apprehensions, and frustrations must be acknowledged and addressed with open communication. The study revealed that parents frequently feel overwhelmed by the fast-paced and complex nature of IEP meetings. Based on the parent interviews, parents believed that the IEP meetings were just formalities without substantial meaningful dialogue. IEP meeting process issues, according to the data, reveal that parents do not understand the process or acronyms used in the meeting. Meetings lack the depth and complexity needed to support young black men with disabilities' future success, and parents feel that more attention is needed when writing student goals. This theme emphasizes the systemic barriers and lack of understanding from educators and administrators that disproportionately affect this demographic group, as highlighted in

previous studies (Fabelo et al., 2011). Additionally, the study's emphasis on the importance of eradicating negative disciplinary patterns that disproportionately impact young black men with learning disabilities aligns with existing research on the disparities in disciplinary actions faced by students of color in the education system (Fabelo et al., 2011).

RQ3: Do parents of young black men have recommendations of practice for IEP teams based upon their experience?

The third research question seeks to elicit recommendations for practice from parents of young black men based on their experiences with IEP meetings. By exploring the parent's insights and perspectives, the study aims to identify potential areas for improvement in IEP team practices. These recommendations hold the promise of informing and guiding educators, administrators, and policymakers in developing more effective and equitable postsecondary opportunities for African American men students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, the recommendations provided by participants for improving IEP team practices were to prioritize authentic communication and cultural competence, and echo calls for equity and inclusivity in special education processes (Harrison et al., 2017). These recommendations align with broader discussions in the literature about addressing structural inequalities and biases within the education system to ensure equitable outcomes for all students, regardless of race or disability status (Fabelo et al., 2011). While this study adds valuable insights into the experiences of parents of young Black men who are students with learning disabilities, its findings align closely with existing research on the challenges within the IEP process and transition planning. The highlighted themes and recommended improvement strategies contribute to ongoing efforts to promote equity and inclusivity in special education practices.

Ms. Smith made this recommendation:

> Having a more reciprocal conversation. That's the biggest one. It's a reciprocal conversation. They always say ARD meetings should never be predetermined, but they are. The district knows what they're going to say. They know what they're going to put in for goals and accommodations, but they're not asking the parents truly for their input.

Elena commented, “I think that the students should be in the ARD so that way they can be able to speak and say, "Well, I would rather this," or "I would rather that," or "This isn't working," versus just the parent trying to say, "I feel like this isn't working or that's not," it can come directly from them. Also, they need to take time for the meeting, mine was less than an hour.”

Angie said,

> I think it would be better before the ARD to- for the parents to have a list of, uh, frequently asked questions, um, and maybe a student advocate at the meetings, um, that way, if it's something that the parent didn't know to ask, the, you know, the advocate probably would, you know, ask those questions. Because, like, the advocate knows the law. The advocate knows the ins and outs. Parents, we don't know. We thinking that the school and the teachers have the best interests in mind for our kids, so we just kind of go with the flow. But an advocate, they have studied. They understand, they know what the laws are. They know what these schools need to incoming. Like, parents just don't know. We just, we just trying to figure it out.

Sarah Jacobs stated,

> So, there's definitely room in our school system to create space for children with disabilities so that they feel included and feel like they're learning to the best of their ability. They have the support and the tools that they need. Ultimately, they have an

administration that's trained, has expertise, and is committed to all students, including students with disabilities.

By highlighting the importance of authentic communication, cultural competence, and individualized support in the IEP process and transition planning, the study contributes valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers to promote equity and improve outcomes for this demographic group.

Implications for Practice

The research investigates the experiences of African American parents with young men having specific learning disabilities, focusing on their engagement in IEP meetings and the transition from high school to postsecondary education. Several key findings and themes emerge from the study.

1. Perceptions of the IEP Process. Black parents of young men with learning disabilities perceive the IEP process as crucial yet challenging. They emphasize the need for authentic conversations during IEP meetings to effectively address their children's goals, dreams, and desires. These parents stress the importance of understanding each student's unique needs to facilitate postsecondary education opportunities.
2. Experiences in IEP meetings. Parents describe their experiences in IEP meetings as complex and sometimes frustrating (Fabelo et al., 2011). They encounter various barriers, including a lack of understanding from educators and administrators, leading to feelings of marginalization and objectification. Despite these challenges, parents emphasize the significance of participating in these meetings to advocate for their children's educational needs.

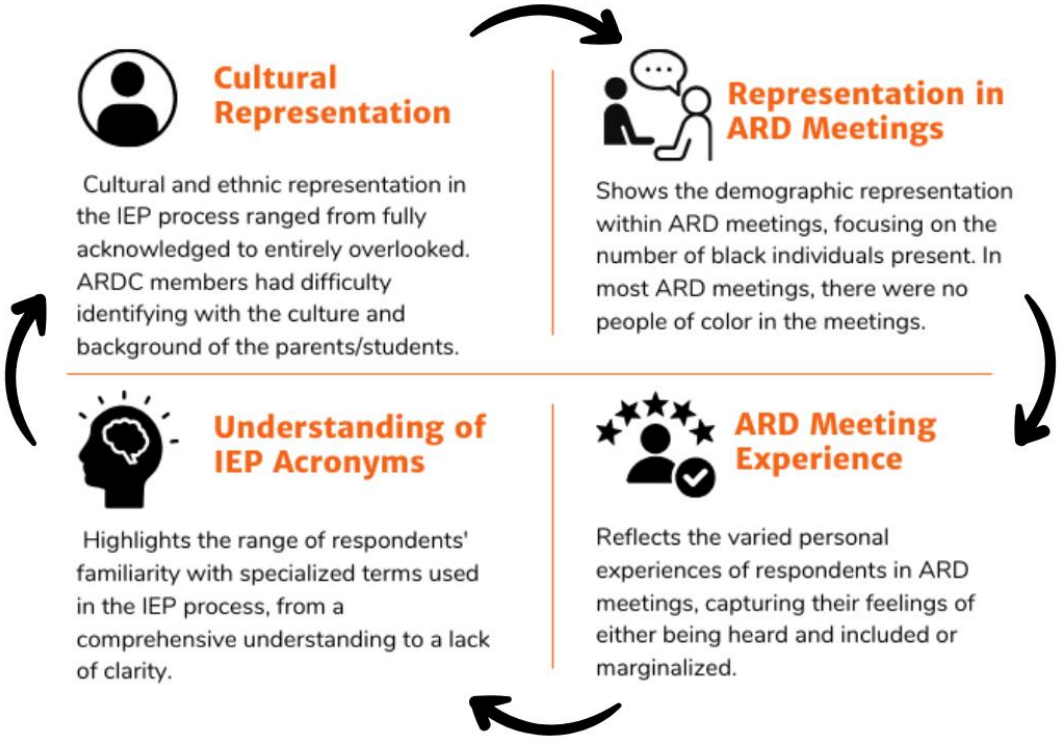
3. Recommendations for IEP Teams. Based on their experiences, parents provide recommendations for improving IEP team practices (Harrison et al., 2017). They emphasize the importance of eradicating negative disciplinary patterns that disproportionately affect African American young men with learning disabilities. Parents stress the need for IEP teams to prioritize authentic communication, cultural competence, and individualized support strategies tailored to the unique needs of each student.

The findings of this study align with existing research on the challenges faced by African American parents of young black men with learning disabilities in navigating IEP and transition planning. Consistent with previous literature, the study highlights the crucial nature of transition planning for parents of young Black men who are students with disabilities, underscoring the need for authentic conversations that address their children's unique goals and aspirations (Fabelo et al., 2011).

The study sheds light on the experiences of parents with young black men living with learning disabilities. By delving into these aspects, we hope to contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic approach to the education system, particularly in the context of special education and the IEP meeting and transition planning process. It highlights the importance of authentic communication, cultural competence, and individualized support in the IEP process and transition planning. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to promote equity and improve outcomes for this subpopulation of students.

Figure 1

IEP Process and ARD Meeting Elements



Note. I created this figure.

ARD Meeting Experience

Understanding the experiences of African American parents with young men with learning disabilities has significant implications for practice in the field of education. By recognizing the challenges and barriers these parents face, educators, administrators, and policymakers can work toward implementing effective strategies to promote equity and improve outcomes for this demographic group (Ainscow, 2020). During the IEP and transition meeting, parents try to navigate through the legal jargon and acronyms to understand and provide input in the meeting, only to have their voices silenced by confusion or misunderstandings. Prioritizing authentic communication during IEP meetings is essential. Black parents of young men with learning disabilities emphasize the need for open, honest dialogue that considers their children's

goals, dreams, and desires. Educators and IEP team members should actively listen to parents' concerns, validate their experiences, and collaborate with them to develop tailored support plans that meet the unique needs of each student.

Representation in ARD Meetings

Cultural competence is another critical aspect that should be integrated into educational practices. Administrators, teachers, counselors, and diagnosticians must seek to understand the cultural differences that exist among Black men. Parents of Black men with learning disabilities are culturally underrepresented during transition meetings, as indicated in the study. Parents do not believe that administrators, educators, counselors, and diagnosticians understand what Black men experience culturally. Especially when ARD committees are composed of middle-class White women, not only do they not understand the Black male perspective, but they struggle with hearing and understanding the Black parents' perspective as well.

People and race can be nonnegotiable during ARD meetings, meaning that there may not be Black administrators, educators, counselors, or diagnosticians educating Black men or on campus. The TEA (2022) reported that only 11.11% of Texas teachers identify as Black. There were 56.57% who identified as White, and 28.80% identified as Hispanic. David W. Marshall stated in an editorial that Black men teachers made up a frightening 1.3% of the teaching workforce on January 25, 2024. Therefore, cultural representation can be difficult at transition meetings. Since there is a physical shortage of Black representation among the ARD committee members, it is imperative that recruitment practices are done with the intention of procuring Black men and women teachers.

Cultural Representation

Staffing schools with Black administrators and classroom teachers who look like Black men will help with cultural representation during transition meetings. Recruiting from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) will add cultural diversity to our schools. Students learn better when they see people who look and sound like them. Students need and will benefit from administrators, educators, counselors, and diagnosticians who can identify with them and their history. They too understand that their ancestors were forced to come to America, they did not choose to take a "maiden voyage" in chains. Black administrators, educators, counselors, and diagnosticians can identify with their students who live in the "projects" and low-income housing. They can identify with the struggles that Black men experience with the systemic racism ingrained in the fabric of America. When schools are staffed with Black administrators and educators, young black men with disabilities see successful Black role models.

The Black culture should be duplicated in the classroom and throughout the curriculum. Additional resources, such as read-a-loud and library books displaying the lives of African Americans, have to be available for Black students to read and peruse. Promoting Black History Month will give Black parents the perception that their culture and history are valued and respected in the school. Addressing the elephant in the room during transition meetings can be awkward, but with the implementation of these practices, it is possible that parents of young black men with learning disabilities will feel comfortable allowing their voices to be heard. Giving way to the necessary conversations during transition meetings that hold ARD committees accountable for writing academically appropriate goals and transition plans that are unique to each young black men with learning disabilities.

Educators must become empathic to today's cultural climate for Black Americans, specifically Black men. Black men are being harassed and gunned down while taking neighborhood jogs and walking from the convenience store to get a snack. They are being choked to death in front of audiences who are begging for their lives. It is paramount that educators know the fears, struggles, biases, ideologies, and language of Black men with disabilities to provide authentic cultural representation during transition meetings. Parents of young black men with learning disabilities often feel marginalized and symbolized during IEP meetings due to a lack of understanding from educators and administrators.

Professional Development

To address this, training programs and professional development opportunities should focus on enhancing cultural competence among school personnel. Cultural responsiveness has to become a part of district and campus professional development. Teachers have to learn the culture of Black students, specifically young Black men who are students with learning disabilities. Educators have to find out why wearing caps, bennies, and hoodies as part of their everyday attire is important to the survival of Black men. Understanding why Black men sag their pants while wearing a belt, could be representative of being cool, a fad, accepted by peers, or they could have just been taught that way by an older sibling. The reasons could go on and on. Teachers and administrators of young Black men, have to reach out to their parents to understand their community; they must see where their students live and play. School bus tours before the year starts or riding the bus with students can provide teachers and administrators with a valuable visualization of a student's environment.

Parent Involvement Opportunity

Home visits prior to ARD meetings can help ease tensions and leverage implicit biases that teachers have about young black men with disabilities and their parents. During the home visit, teachers and administrators can better understand the Black family structure and learn that, although they are of the same race, they are uniquely different. Learning their ideologies about what creates their identities has to become a priority. Building a cultural bridge is essential for ARD committee members to help parents feel culturally represented in transition meetings. Ensuring that the cultural background of all students and their families is acknowledged and respected is essential for an inclusive special education environment. Identifying and understanding their cultural norms will better help IEP committees create transition plans specific to the success of young black men with disabilities. Educators can build stronger relationships and create more inclusive learning environments by fostering a deeper understanding of African American families' cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Parent-Staffing Collaboration

Parents could benefit from informational meetings about the special education process. Parents' participation in the transition meetings is encouraged. Parents in the study voiced that they have difficulty understanding the acronyms used during transition meetings. Understanding the jargon during transition meetings is essential and has a direct influence on meeting outcomes. Along with their limited understanding, parents of young Black men with disabilities do not know what the acronyms mean. When diagnosticians request parent surveys or when sending procedural safeguards, the frequently used acronym can also be provided. The sheet will need to state the acronym, its definition, and an explanation of how it is used for the benefit of students in special education. Required staffing with parents before the transition planning meetings in

person or by phone to explain the transition planning process and the acronyms. During the transition meeting, acronyms are accessible to all the committee members and the parents for quick reference. Providing time for parents to ask any questions and address misconceptions that may occur during the meetings. Rushing to complete a transition meeting in 45 minutes or less is an injustice to the parents and students who have to journey through the special education process to get an opportunity for postsecondary education. With time constraints, a lack of understanding of acronyms, and cultural underrepresentation, parents have a negative view of the transition planning meetings, causing them to be silent during transition meetings, leaving the fate of the sons in the hands of people meeting compliance regulations.

Equitable Strategies

Individualized support strategies are essential for ensuring academic success and postsecondary opportunities for young black men with learning disabilities. Parents highlight the importance of eradicating negative disciplinary patterns that disproportionately affect African American men (Bressane et al., 2024). Transformative leadership is a potential solution to the educational inequities faced by African American boy students with disabilities, as it addresses the needs of diverse populations and provides resources for student success. This approach seeks to make changes due to inequality or social injustice in organizations. Researching the intersection of race, gender, and disability and IEP teams for African American men transitioning to postsecondary education can help stakeholders understand the barriers young black men with learning disabilities encounter. Educators should implement proactive measures to address disciplinary disparities and provide targeted support to students at risk of being pushed out of the educational system. This may include implementing restorative justice practices,

providing social-emotional learning resources, and fostering positive relationships between students and school staff.

Furthermore, policymakers are crucial in advocating for policy changes that promote equity and address systemic barriers within the education system. By addressing factors such as implicit bias, disproportionate disciplinary practices, and low academic expectations, policymakers can create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for young black men with learning disabilities. Researchers have to move beyond the numbers of quantitative research and listen to the experiences of young black men and their parents to get a greater understanding of the discrepancies in the special education system. Controlled experimental research in special education legitimizes research results in numbers, but without getting qualitative ethnographies of the real experiences of people. That is not to say we should stop conducting controlled studies; it only suggests that there is a need to look at all the data to gain holistic outcomes.

The findings of this study stress the importance of authentic communication, cultural competence, recruiting Black educators, and promoting positive educational outcomes for African American young men with learning disabilities. By implementing these strategies in practice, educators, administrators, and policymakers can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for all students. The strategies will give voice to the parents of young black men with disabilities and provide opportunities for postsecondary education.

Implications for Future Research

The present study exposed several areas where additional research is needed to better understand the transition-planning needs of young black men with specific learning disabilities.

While the phenomenological approach gave insight to the experiences of parents of the children in the ARD process, there are other facets that need further exploration.

Longitudinal Studies

Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how parental experiences and perceptions evolve within the ARD process. Researchers can capture changes in attitudes, challenges, and outcomes by conducting follow-up interviews (Appendix C) or surveys with participants at multiple points throughout their children's educational journey. Longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into the dynamic nature of parental engagement and its impact on educational outcomes for young Black men with learning disabilities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a critical concept that considers how various social identities, such as race, gender, class, and disability, intersect shape individuals' experiences and outcomes. Future research could explore how intersectional factors influence parental experiences within the ARD process. By examining how factors like socioeconomic status, geographic location, or parental educational background intersect with race and disability, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by young black men's parents.

Comparative Studies

Comparative studies could compare the experiences of young black men's parents with those of other demographic groups, such as White parents, Hispanic parents, or parents of other marginalized communities. By comparing experiences across different racial and ethnic groups, researchers can identify similarities, differences, and unique challenges faced by young black men's parents within the ARD process. Comparative studies would contribute to a broader understanding of equity and inclusion in special education and transition planning.

Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a collaborative research approach that involves community members as equal partners in the research process (Breland-Noble et al., 2024). Future studies could adopt a CBPR approach to engage young black men's parents, educators, administrators, and community stakeholders in co-creating research questions, data collection methods, and dissemination strategies. By focusing on the voices and perspectives of the community, CBPR can lead to more culturally responsive and impactful research outcomes.

Policy Analysis

Policy analysis research could examine the impact of educational policies and practices on the experiences of young black men's parents within the ARD process. Researchers could analyze federal, state, and local policies related to special education, discipline, transition planning, and parental engagement to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Policy analysis studies could inform advocacy efforts and policy reforms to promote equity and inclusion in special education.

Limitations

Limitations in the study show the potential challenges and boundaries that might influence the scope and conclusions drawn from the research. Despite striving for a comprehensive insight into the experiences of young black men's parents navigating the ARD process for their sons with learning disabilities, several limitations must be acknowledged (Peoples, 2021). Firstly, the study's sample size constrains the overview of findings. While purposeful sampling was employed to ensure participants possess relevant experiences with the phenomenon under investigation, the relatively small number of participants, ranging between nine and 11 subjects, might not fully summarize the diversity of perspectives within the

population. This limited sample size may restrict the transfer of findings to broader contexts, such as different geographic regions or socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the study's timeframe presents a constraint. By capturing a snapshot of parental experiences during ARD meetings within a specific timeframe, the research may not account for potential variations or developments over time. Parental perceptions and interactions within the ARD process could evolve with changing educational policies, societal dynamics, or personal circumstances, which this study could not fully capture due to its static timeframe.

Another notable limitation pertains to the potential for recall bias among participants. Parents may not accurately recall or articulate their experiences during ARD meetings, leading to discrepancies or incomplete representations of their interactions (Peoples, 2021). Memory lapses or subjective interpretations might inadvertently influence the data collected, impacting the study's reliability and validity. Moreover, the study's focus exclusively on young black men's parents of students with learning disabilities transitioning from high school introduces a delimitation that could affect the breadth of insights gained. By narrowing the scope to this specific demographic subset, the study may overlook valuable perspectives from other stakeholder groups, such as educators, administrators, or students. Consequently, the findings might not fully reflect the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the ARD process. Characteristic biases, whether conscious or unconscious, could potentially influence the research process and interpretation of findings. Despite efforts to mitigate researcher bias through demanding methodological approaches and ethical considerations, personal predispositions or preconceptions might inadvertently shape data collection, analysis, or interpretation, influencing the study's outcomes. While the phenomenological approach adopted in this study offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of young black men's parents navigating the ARD

process for their sons with learning disabilities, it is essential to acknowledge and address the limitations inherent in the research design and methodology to ensure the validity and applicability of the findings.

Summary

The chapter describes the obstacles, struggles, and suggestions voiced by African American parents as they navigate the educational journey for their young men struggling with learning disabilities. Through a phenomenological lens, the study has unearthed key findings and themes, illuminating the perceptions of the IEP process, the complexities of engagement in IEP meetings, and recommendations for improving support mechanisms. The implications for practice are profound, emphasizing the effects of authentic communication, cultural competence, and individualized support strategies in promoting equity and inclusivity in education. As we embark on future endeavors, longitudinal studies, intersectional analyses, comparative inquiries, community-based participatory research, and policy analyses offer avenues for further exploration and action. By addressing the voices and experiences of parents of young black men with learning disabilities, educators, administrators, and policymakers, people can collectively strive towards a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for all students, regardless of race or disability status.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-2023-160
Title: Transition Plans: A Phenomenological Study of Black Male Children's Parents' Experiences at ARD Meetings
Creation Date: 6-26-2023
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Bobby Durst
Review Board: ACU IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Exempt	Decision Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member Joel Self	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact jss00c@acu.edu
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Appendix B: Initial Interview Protocol

Front Matter:

Thank you for meeting with me. My name is Bobby Durst, and I am conducting a study to understand parents' experiences of young black men in their transition planning in the Admission, Review, and Dismissal meetings, also called the ARD meeting. Transition plans are part of the meeting where the committee members, including the parents, are asked to think about a child's future abilities and plan the child's education to reach those goals. My study is focused on parents' experiences as the committee discusses that plan. I will ask you for a pseudonym, or fake name, for us to use throughout the rest of the interview. I will never refer to you by your real name in the interview, in my transcripts, or when I write up my findings in my dissertation; I will always refer to you by the name you chose. It is very important to me that you feel comfortable participating in these interviews. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions, or if you would like to quit at any time, please feel free to let me know. What pseudonym, or fake name, would you like for me to refer to you in this interview?

_____. Ok, _____, do you have any questions for me before I begin?

Interview:

1. Describe your child's qualifying disability and how did you learn of the disability?
2. How did you find out that your child has a disability?
3. What was it like to attend the first ARD meeting?
4. How long have you been coming to the ARD meeting?
5. Have you ever asked someone to come with you to an ARD? Why?
6. Is your child present? Why?

7. Tell me about your child's first years in special education.

8. Who was most helpful to you in the beginning? How were they helpful?

9. Have you ever used an advocate? If yes, by phone or in person, and how did you choose the advocate?

10. Can you tell me all the individuals in the ARD meeting and their roles?

11. How is the room arranged and what equipment is used?

12. Tell me about the seating arrangements for the ARD meeting.

13. What has been your role in the ARD meeting?

14. Explain how you understand your rights in the special education process.

15. Tell me about your first encounter with the special education process.

16. Tell me about your most recent experience in an ARD meeting.

17. What happened when you tried to share your concerns about your child in the ARD?

18. What kind of future do you think your school officials have in mind for your child?"

19. How do you feel about your student's ARD meeting?

20. What type of dialogue occurred during the meeting?

21. Explain your child's goals and transition plan.

22. Discuss your and your student's input on the plan.

23. Do you feel that the special education representative addressed your concerns?

24. "If you were giving advice to a parent going to an ARD for the first time, what would that advice be?

25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in ARD meetings?

End Matter:

Thank you so much for meeting with me, _____. The second part of this interview will occur after you have had an ARD meeting. When I have completed both interviews, I will transcribe them in written form. If you would like, I am happy to share those transcriptions with you. You will have an opportunity to edit anything you'd like to change, remove, or add before I move on to the analysis. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you again for sharing your time, your experiences, and this part of your life with me.

Appendix C: Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Front Matter:

Thank you for meeting with me again. As you may remember, my name is ____, and I am conducting a study to understand parents' experiences of young black men in their transition planning in the admission, review, and dismissal meetings, also called the ARD meeting. Transition plans are part of the meeting where the committee members, including the parents, are asked to think about a child's future abilities and plan the child's education to reach those goals. My study is focused on parents' experiences as the committee discusses that plan. I will continue to refer to you as _____. I will never refer to you by your real name in the interview, in my transcripts, or when I write up my findings in my dissertation; I will always refer to you by the name you chose. It is very important to me that you feel comfortable in participating in these interviews. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions, or if you would like to quit at any time, please feel free to let me know. Ok, _____, do you have any questions for me before I begin?

Interview:

1. What are your feelings about the ARD meeting after it took place?
2. Describe your input in writing goals for your child.
3. Do you feel the ARD meeting was beneficial to your child's transition?
4. How did the ARD committee incorporate your child's dreams and aspirations in the goal planning process?
5. What would you change in the ARD meeting?
6. Describe the body language of committee members before, during, and after the ARD meeting.

7. Who asked the questions and conducted the ARD meeting?

8. Please explain your level of understanding the acronyms used during the ARD meeting.

9. Were you comfortable and knowledgeable enough to express your concerns or ask questions?

10. How will the goals established in the ARD meeting affect your child's future?

11. What suggestions do you have to better the ARD process for students transitioning from high school?

12. Were you the only person of color in the ARD meeting?

13. Which was more important to the meeting members: documenting the meeting correctly or planning for your child's education and future? What gave you that impression?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the ARD meeting?

End Matter:

Thank you so much for meeting with me, _____. This is our final interview. My next step will be transcribing both interviews into written form. If you would like, I am happy to share those transcriptions with you. You will have an opportunity to edit anything you'd like to change, remove, or add before I move on to the analysis. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you again for sharing your time, your experiences, and this part of your life with me.

Appendix D: Codes and Themes by Research Question

Codes and Themes for Research Question 1

RQ 1 How do Black parents with young men with a specific learning disability perceive the IEP process	# of participants	# of times the theme appeared
The IEP process was difficult	6	11
Subtheme_Other-race staff may not understand what the Black males needs	2	2
Role of race	2	2
not beneficial	1	2
no input	1	1
No future focus	2	2
didn't do enough	4	6
The child had a difficult time with the diagnosis	7	10
Isolated	2	2
Embarrassed	3	3
Discouraged	1	1
difficult and challenging	2	2
Satisfied with the IEP process	4	16
thrived and helped	2	3
Relieved	1	1
Knew best	1	1
Helpful	1	2
Happy	1	1
addressed concerns	3	4
Parents understood their rights	2	2
Understand	2	2
Shared rights	1	1
Parents had support and guidance from teachers and others with expertise on the IEP process	8	8
Teachers helped	5	5
Family Members helped	1	1
diagnostician	1	1
AP	1	1
Parents had a difficult time with the diagnosis	7	10
Nervous	2	2
Guilt	1	1
Denial	2	3

Anxious and apprehensive	5	5
Parents did not understand the process or their rights	7	17
no knowledge	4	4
Didn't know or understand	6	10
Didn't explain	3	4
Confusing	1	1
Information not provided about resources and accommodations	10	21
Not shared	7	12
Not discussed	2	2
Didn't know	5	7
Information about the IEP process was provided	8	8
provided information	2	2
explanations	5	5
acronyms	1	1
Goals were established for the child	11	18
Parents or students had input	4	7
No input from parents or students	6	7

Codes and Themes for Research Question 2

RQ 2 How do parents of young black men labeled with learning disabilities who are transitioning from high school describe their IEP meeting experience	# of participants	# of times the theme appeared
The meeting included discussion of resources and parents provided input	16	42
Parents provided input and information during the meeting	9	15
Parents advocate discussed their preferences and concerns for interventions in the meeting	11	20
Certain staff provided most of the info and did most of the talking	9	12
Students meeting attendance varies	8	10
Students do not attend meeting	4	6
Students attended meetings and give input	4	5
Students involvement in goal planning varies	9	11
Students are part of goal planning and plans	5	6
Students are not part of goal planning	4	5
Some parents felt the meeting was beneficial for their son and others did not	16	37
Was beneficial for the child	9	12
The meeting was not beneficial	10	25
Parents predominantly felt that the IEP meeting did not go well	13	30
the meeting was confusing overwhelming or not what was expected	4	11
Staff did not explain certain things well	4	4
Parents did not have a voice or input in the goals	9	15
Parents felt the IEP meeting was okay	5	11
In some cases, few people of color attended the meeting	7	7
People of color were in the meeting	3	3
Few to no people of color attendees	4	4
A variety of staff attended the meeting, and parents primarily attend alone without an advocate	10	15
Various staff attend the meeting	10	15
Parents primarily attend the meeting alone	7	9
Did not use an advocate	8	8

Codes and Themes for Research Question 3

RQ 3 Do parents of young black men have recommendations of practice for IEP teams based upon their experience?	# of participants	# of times the theme appeared
Recommendations for the school	0	0
Provide more teacher trainings for working with students who have a disability	1	2
Provide more one on one services and accommodations	1	2
Include student input and involve students	3	4
Include more staff input	1	1
Engage in additional planning for the students transition	5	11
Allow more parental input and involvement	1	2
Recommendations for other parents	0	0
Take a child advocate with you to the meeting	3	3
Request that paperwork be mailed	1	1
Record and document the meeting	1	1
Keep an open mind	1	1
Get involved and ask questions	6	6
Get FAQS and information before the meeting	5	5
Ensure the child is accommodated as required and in a way that meets their needs and goals	2	2
Consult with an expert	2	3