

Reimagining Equity: Embodying Mentorship to Empower Historically Underserved Educators and Transform Educational Landscapes

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Abstract

Historically underserved high school students, particularly Black and Brown students, face significant barriers to pursuing careers in education due to systemic inequities such as underfunded schools, limited access to resources, and a lack of representation in the teaching workforce. Texas Senate Bill 17, which restricts Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in higher education, exacerbates these challenges by eliminating critical support systems for aspiring educators of color. Mentoring programs tailored to the needs of Black and Brown students are essential in addressing these inequities. Such programs provide guidance, academic support, and culturally responsive mentorship that help students overcome barriers and succeed in educational careers. This literature review synthesizes research on the impact of mentoring programs, highlighting their potential to create more diverse and inclusive educational environments by supporting students who aspire to become educators. Recommendations for improving these programs aim to reimagine them as sustainable pipelines for future teachers from marginalized communities.

Key Words

teacher education, mentoring, high school mentoring

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Historically underserved high school students, particularly those from Black and Brown communities, face significant educational inequities that hinder their academic and career success (Gordon et al., 2009; Opara et al., 2023; Somers et al., 2016). These inequities are often rooted in systemic issues such as underfunded schools, limited access to advanced coursework, and inadequate resources that disproportionately affect

students of color. This gap widens as these students pursue higher education and career opportunities, especially in fields like education, where representation is critically low. Black and Brown students who aspire to become educators often encounter barriers such as financial obstacles, a lack of role models in the teaching profession, and insufficient support networks (Weiss et al., 2019).

Community-engaged research (CEnR) approaches provide a pathway to addressing these disparities by fostering partnerships between researchers, educators, and local communities to collaboratively identify and implement solutions. Community engagement initiatives, such as high school mentoring programs, create meaningful interactions between students and their communities, promoting academic achievement and personal growth (Smith et al., 2022). These initiatives leverage the principles of CEnR, emphasizing reciprocity, shared decision-making, and respect for community knowledge, to co-create mentorship opportunities that enhance both academic and life skills (Luger et al., 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that integrating evidence-based practices and fostering mutual respect in mentor-mentee relationships can improve program outcomes, enhancing social capital and resilience among participants (Zainol & Salam, 2021; Beals et al., 2021). Through structured, reciprocal interactions, these programs can address social-emotional needs while building a foundation for long-term success (Lyons et al., 2019).

The recent passage of Texas Senate Bill 17 exacerbates these challenges, as the bill restricts Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in higher education institutions across Texas. By limiting DEI programs, SB 17 undermines efforts to address systemic barriers and promote greater representation of Black and Brown educators in Texas (McGee, 2023). This legislative shift not only curtails recruitment and retention initiatives for educators of color but also threatens to undermine community-engaged mentorship programs that rely on the collaborative principles of CEnR. Without DEI initiatives, opportunities for support, representation, and mentorship for Black and Brown students are further diminished, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation in the teaching profession (Grey, 2019). By integrating CEnR frameworks, stakeholders can work to sustain and expand efforts that center on community voices.

Importance of Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs are essential tools for addressing the challenges faced by Black and Brown students, particularly those who aspire to become educators. These programs can provide critical support by offering personalized guidance, academic resources, and career advice that help students navigate the complex pathways into higher education and teaching careers. For historically underserved students, mentoring programs also serve as a means of combating the isolation and underrepresentation they often experience in predominantly White academic and professional spaces (Somers et al., 2016). Effective mentoring programs can connect students with role models who share their cultural and racial backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and inspiration (Opara et al., 2023). However, systemic inequities extend beyond mentoring programs to broader structural issues that hinder pathways into the teaching profession. For example, the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE) inspires students to pursue teaching by offering leadership development, career exploration, and skills training, addressing the need for a diverse educator pipeline. Yet, schools with predominantly Black and Brown students often face significant challenges in accessing TAFE programs due to a lack of resources to establish and sustain them. This disparity limits opportunities for students of color to explore careers in education, perpetuating underrepresentation in teaching professions (Skelton, 2023).

Expanding access to initiatives like TAFE is crucial, as research shows that diverse teaching staff positively influence academic achievement and reduce dropout rates, particularly for Black and Hispanic students (Gershenson et al., 2022; Salazar, 2023). Similarly, mentoring programs can help bridge these gaps by providing practical assistance, such as internship opportunities, financial aid guidance, and exposure to teaching practices. Collaborative policy efforts and equitable funding for programs like TAFE and mentoring initiatives are essential to addressing systemic inequities and fostering inclusive pathways to education careers for all students (Skelton, 2023; Rafa & Roberts, 2020). Ultimately, both TAFE expansion and

effective mentoring programs play pivotal roles in empowering Black and Brown students to overcome systemic barriers. Together, they can inspire and prepare the next generation of diverse educators, helping to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Purpose and Scope of the Review

The purpose of this review is to synthesize and critique existing literature on mentoring programs designed to support Black and Brown high school students who aspire to become educators. This manuscript will examine the specific challenges these students face, such as systemic inequities in education, financial barriers, and the lack of representation in the teaching profession. By reviewing the literature, this analysis aims to highlight the effectiveness of various mentoring models in addressing these challenges, with a focus on programs that provide culturally responsive support and career preparation. Additionally, this review will explore gaps in current research and propose recommendations for reimagining mentoring programs to better serve historically marginalized students. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how to develop sustainable pipelines for Black and Brown students into the teaching profession, thereby fostering greater diversity and equity within the education system.

Problem Statement

The underrepresentation of Black and Brown educators in Texas, a growing concern amid the state's diversifying student population, is expected to worsen with the passage of Texas Senate Bill 17 (SB 17). By banning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in public universities, the bill eliminates crucial support systems that have historically helped recruit, support, and retain underrepresented faculty members (McGee, 2023; Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). This move, already leading to job cuts at institutions like the University of Texas, is anticipated to further limit opportunities for Black and Brown educators to enter and succeed in academia (Blazar et al., 2023; Lafferty et al., 2024).

Proponents of the bill argue that DEI programs often prioritize race over merit and contribute to division rather than inclusivity (Schein, 2024). However, critics maintain that without such programs, public universities will struggle to create welcoming environments for educators and students of color, which could further discourage diverse hiring and retention (McGee, 2023). The teaching workforce remains predominantly White, which highlights the importance of increasing diversity among educators to better reflect and connect with the cultural and experiential backgrounds of the diverse student population they serve (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). Moreover, the state's broad geographic and economic disparities exacerbate these challenges, as students in underserved areas often have fewer opportunities to connect with mentors who can guide them on this career path (Garcia et al., 2021). The disparity in representation contributes to educational inequities, as students often miss out on the benefits of having role models who understand their cultural contexts and can address the specific challenges they face (Blazar et al., 2023).

High school mentoring programs designed to support Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators are largely underdeveloped in Texas (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). Community engagement initiatives in such programs can create meaningful interactions between students and their communities, promoting academic achievement and personal growth (Smith et al., 2022). Effective programs often involve collaborative partnerships with stakeholders, such as educators and local professionals, to provide students with mentorship opportunities that enhance both academic and life skills (Jones et al., 2019). Furthermore, integrating evidence-based practices and fostering mutual respect in mentor-mentee relationships can improve program outcomes, enhancing social capital and resilience among participants (Zainol & Salam, 2021; Beals et al., 2021). Despite their potential, many students from Black and Brown communities in Texas lack access to these resources, professional guidance, and mentorship from educators who reflect their experiences (NCES,

2023). These gaps, combined with economic barriers and systemic inequalities, make it difficult for Black and Brown students to pursue careers in education (Blazar et al., 2023). Without early exposure to the teaching profession and sustained support, many potential future educators are deterred from entering the field, further perpetuating the lack of diversity in Texas' educational workforce (Johnson & Williams, 2021).

Reimagining high school mentoring programs for Black and Brown students in Texas is critical to addressing this problem and creating a more equitable educational environment (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). These programs must not only provide culturally responsive mentoring, professional development, and direct pathways to higher education and teacher certification (Schein, 2024) but also integrate structured, reciprocal interactions that address social-emotional needs and build a foundation for long-term success (Lyons et al., 2019). By offering tailored support, community engagement, and career preparation, such programs can help close the representation gap and empower students to overcome systemic barriers (Blazar et al., 2023). In doing so, Texas can cultivate a diverse and effective teaching workforce that better reflects its student population, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes for all students across the state (McGee, 2023).

Key Research Question

How can high school mentoring programs be reimagined to effectively support and empower Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators, addressing systemic barriers and fostering long-term success in the field of education?

Significance of the Problem

The underrepresentation of Black and Brown educators in the U.S. teaching workforce is a significant issue that has far-reaching implications for students, schools, and communities (Cole, 1986). The influence of a diverse teaching workforce on student outcomes and educational equity has been widely examined in

educational research (Schroth & Helfer, 2018). As student demographics grow more diverse across many regions, the limited representation of this diversity among educators presents challenges. This gap affects not only student performance but also the quality of teacher-student relationships and the overall climate of the educational system. A teaching force that reflects the diversity of the student body can contribute to more positive learning experiences, cultural understanding, and equity in education (Goldhaber et al., 2019; Schroth & Helfer, 2018). Structural barriers such as unequal access to quality education, economic challenges, and a lack of targeted support, have long limited the pathways for Black and Brown students to enter the teaching profession. By reimagining high school mentoring programs tailored specifically to these students, we can create a foundation for addressing this imbalance early in their educational journeys, preparing them to navigate these barriers and empowering them to pursue careers in education with confidence.

Mentoring programs for aspiring Black and Brown educators hold the potential to reshape the landscape of education by fostering a pipeline of diverse, committed, and culturally aware teachers. These programs can provide not only academic support but also culturally responsive guidance, career exposure, and role models that reflect the identities and experiences of the students they serve. Moreover, such initiatives can address critical challenges such as the lack of representation and visibility of educators of color, building a support system that encourages retention in the profession (Grey, 2019). In addressing these systemic challenges through innovative mentoring models, we can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for future generations of students.

Themes in the Literature

Theoretical Foundations in Mentoring

Reimagining high school mentoring programs to effectively support and empower Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators is a crucial step toward fostering equity in education. These programs

must address systemic barriers while cultivating long-term academic and professional success. Grounded in frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and Identity Development Theory (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1990), transformative mentoring models can affirm racial identity, leverage cultural strengths, and promote resilience. Together, these frameworks create a comprehensive foundation for mentoring programs that empower students to thrive in the field of education.

Addressing challenges such as inequitable resources, limited access to advanced coursework, and the lack of culturally responsive support systems, these programs hold the potential to bridge opportunity gaps and encourage persistence in teacher education pathways. Moreover, by integrating peer mentoring and community-centered approaches, mentoring initiatives can foster leadership, self-motivation, and a sense of belonging, ultimately empowering historically underserved students to thrive and lead in educational spaces.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

High school mentoring programs can be reimagined to better support and empower Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators by incorporating Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the concept of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). CRT examines how systemic racism is embedded within educational structures and advocates for dismantling these inequalities. When applied to mentoring, CRT-based programs focus on affirming students' racial and cultural identities while empowering them to navigate and confront racialized experiences. A key element of this approach is counter-storytelling, which allows students to share their lived experiences and challenge dominant narratives about race and education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, CRT-based mentoring fosters critical consciousness, enabling students to understand the social and political dynamics shaping their educational journeys and encouraging them to advocate for justice in their communities.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community Cultural Wealth complements CRT by shifting the focus from deficits to the assets that students of color bring from their communities. Yosso (2005) highlights various forms of capital, including aspirational, linguistic, familial, and navigational capital, that mentoring programs can leverage to help students succeed. Programs grounded in this framework emphasize the value of students' cultural knowledge, language skills, and community ties, encouraging them to use these resources as strengths rather than barriers. By recognizing and affirming these forms of capital, mentors help students draw from their backgrounds to achieve success in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Together, CRT and Community Cultural Wealth create a comprehensive mentoring approach that not only addresses systemic barriers but also empowers students by valuing their identities and cultural contributions (Yosso, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Identity Development Theory (Cross's Nigrescence Model & Phinney's Ethnic Identity Development Model)

High school mentoring programs can be reimagined to more effectively support and empower Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators by incorporating Identity Development Theory, particularly Cross's Nigrescence Model and Phinney's Ethnic Identity Development Model. These frameworks explore the development of racial and ethnic identity, especially within marginalized communities, where students often face complex social dynamics related to race. Cross's Nigrescence Model outlines the stages of Black identity development, emphasizing how individuals move from a lack of racial awareness to a deep commitment to Blackness and social justice (Cross, 1971; Cross & Cross, 2008). Phinney's model, on the other hand, focuses on ethnic identity development across various minority groups, highlighting exploration and

commitment as key components of achieving a positive ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). By applying these models, mentoring programs can help Black and Brown students navigate the complex process of racial identity formation, guiding them through stages of exploration, identity development, and affirmation.

Mentors who utilize Identity Development Theory can assist students in overcoming internalized racism and fostering pride in their cultural backgrounds, which is crucial for building resilience in the face of discrimination. Research shows that positive racial and ethnic identity is associated with better psychological well-being, higher academic achievement, and greater self-efficacy, all of which are essential for success in the field of education (Cokley, 2007; Umaña-Taylor, 2011). By fostering a strong sense of self-pride and helping students develop strategies to confront racialized experiences, mentors can equip students with the tools to overcome systemic barriers. This approach not only promotes personal growth but also positions students to become effective educators who can inspire and empower future generations. Through these identity-centered mentoring frameworks, Black and Brown students can be encouraged to embrace their racial and cultural identities as sources of strength and resilience in their educational journeys (Sellers et al., 1998).

Mentorship is widely recognized as a transformative and equitable approach to fostering social change, particularly in addressing systemic barriers faced by Black and Brown students aspiring to become educators (Lyons & McQuillin, 2019). High school mentoring programs are vital in providing the guidance, resources, and support these students need to overcome challenges, achieve academic success, and cultivate a sense of belonging. By focusing on their unique experiences, mentoring initiatives bridge gaps in educational equity and create pathways to careers in education, contributing to greater diversity in the teaching profession. Grounded in frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Community Cultural Wealth, and Identity Development Theory, mentorship affirms students' identities, leverages their cultural

strengths, and equips them to navigate and challenge racial inequities within the educational system.

The authors view mentorship as a dynamic, multifaceted learning approach that goes beyond traditional one-on-one relationships. Emerging models, such as peer mentoring, group mentoring, and culturally responsive mentoring, highlight mentorship's ability to adapt to evolving educational and professional contexts. These models emphasize mentorship's role in addressing systemic inequities, fostering socially just relationships, and promoting equity in educational outcomes. Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) underscore the importance of distinguishing mentoring from other developmental relationships, framing it as a strategy for systemic reform and capacity building. By synthesizing key research, the researchers illustrate mentorship's potential to create socially transformative environments, particularly when integrated with theoretical frameworks and applied in education fields. Collectively, mentorship is portrayed as a powerful tool for empowering historically underserved students, shaping equitable pathways, and supporting long-term success in the teaching profession.

Challenges Faced by Historically Underserved Students and Teacher Candidates

Historically underserved students and teacher candidates face numerous challenges rooted in systemic barriers that limit their access to quality education. One of the primary obstacles is a lack of representation in curricula, faculty, and leadership roles, which can diminish a sense of belonging and academic success. Research shows that marginalized students, including those from Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous backgrounds, often experience discriminatory policies and practices that disproportionately affect their learning outcomes (García & Weiss, 2019). Additionally, standardized testing and other gatekeeping mechanisms disproportionately disadvantage these groups, leading to lower admission and graduation rates in teacher education programs (Sleeter, 2017). The systemic inequities extend to financial barriers, as many

underserved students and teacher candidates struggle with the rising costs of education, limited scholarships, and inadequate access to financial aid (Horvath, et al., 2018). These factors collectively contribute to the underrepresentation of diverse candidates in the teaching profession, which in turn perpetuates a cycle of inequality in educational settings.

Moreover, historically underserved students often attend schools with fewer resources, which affects their preparedness for teacher education programs. Limited access to advanced coursework, instructional technology, and extracurricular opportunities can hinder their academic development and limit their competitive edge (Darling-Hammond, 2018). Teacher candidates from underserved communities are also more likely to face challenges in securing clinical placements in well-resourced schools, which further impacts their professional preparation (Pellegrino et al., 2015). The absence of culturally responsive mentoring and support systems exacerbates feelings of isolation and discourages persistence in teacher education programs (Paris & Alim, 2017). Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms to create equitable pathways for historically underserved students and teacher candidates, ensuring they receive the resources and support necessary to thrive in educational spaces. These systemic challenges and resource gaps highlight the critical need for targeted mentoring programs in high schools to support historically underserved students and teacher candidates in overcoming barriers and achieving academic and professional success.

Enhanced Academic Attachment and Success

Mentoring programs that focus on cultural pride, strengths, and positive role models have been linked to stronger academic engagement and achievement among Black male students. Gordon and colleagues (2009) found that Researchers have emphasized the need for innovative, culturally responsive programs to improve the academic performance of African American male middle school students. Mentoring has been highlighted as a

promising solution, though the evidence regarding its impact on academic achievement has been mixed. The Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) addresses academic underachievement among Black adolescent males by incorporating an Afro-centric framework, pro-social role modeling, a focus on cultural pride, and single-gender instruction within a co-educational setting. In a study involving 61 Black male middle school students (BEMI: n=29; Comparison: n=32), findings showed that those in the BEMI program achieved significantly higher academic attachment and success compared to their non-mentored peers. Furthermore, positive racial identity attitudes, including immersion/emersion and internalization, were significantly linked to standardized test scores and GPA. The study discusses implications for both policy and practice, underscoring the importance of culturally relevant mentoring approaches.

Hagler and colleagues (2023) authored a virtual special issue (VSI) that presents a curated selection of 22 articles on formal youth mentoring previously published in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* (AJCP). It begins by offering historical context, highlighting AJCP's 2002 special issue on mentoring, which was instrumental in establishing youth mentoring as a key area of research. The review then examines findings from subsequent AJCP studies across three interconnected themes: (1) the importance of fostering high-quality mentoring relationships, (2) the links between youth needs, relationship quality, and outcomes, and (3) effective program practices that lead to more impactful mentoring relationships. The authors also expand on critical commentary from AJCP contributors, urging the field to move beyond paternalistic models that attribute risk solely to youth and families without addressing structural oppression. Recommendations include prioritizing critical consciousness, racial equity, and social justice in mentoring programs, engaging with grassroots initiatives led by communities of color, removing barriers to mentor recruitment, and considering youth identity development in mentoring.

Research underscores the importance of culturally responsive mentoring programs to enhance

academic outcomes for African American male students. The Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) exemplifies this approach, using an Afro-centric framework and cultural pride to improve academic attachment and success, as shown by higher performance among mentored students (Gordon et al., 2009). Similarly, a review of youth mentoring studies emphasizes the need for high-quality relationships and programs that address structural oppression, prioritize racial equity, and engage with grassroots initiatives from marginalized communities (Hagler et al., 2023). Both studies highlight the value of culturally relevant mentoring models in fostering academic achievement and identity development.

Improved Academic Performance and Attendance

Engaging in mentoring programs has been found to notably boost both grade point averages and attendance rates among African American students, especially when the program lasts for more than half of the school year (Linnehan, 2001). These positive effects highlight the importance of long-term support in fostering academic success within this demographic. Linnehan (2001) explored the impact of a work-based mentoring program on the academic performance and behavior of 202 African American students from four urban high schools. Drawing on the program's academic objectives, the characteristics of mentoring, and social learning theory, it was hypothesized that program participation would positively influence grades and attendance. Findings revealed that students who participated in the program for more than half the academic year showed significant improvements in grade point averages and attendance, even when accounting for their previous year's performance. However, this positive effect was not observed for students who participated for a shorter period. The study discusses the implications for the career development of African American students and suggests areas for future research.

Somers and associates (2016) investigated the impact of a combined tutoring and mentoring program on urban, low-income Black students during their transition to high school. A total of 118 ninth-grade

students participated (69 in the experimental group, 49 in the comparison group). After seven months in the program, students in the experimental group demonstrated notable improvements in grade point average, perceived educational commitment and achievement support, and perceived school support. The findings suggest that this intervention was effective in supporting students during the crucial transition to high school and may ultimately contribute to higher graduation rates among these urban youth.

Malin and colleagues (2020) note that school reforms involving partnerships across multiple sectors are becoming more common, though existing research tends to focus on collaborations between education and social services. College and career readiness (CCR) initiatives, like the one featured in this study, are often inherently cross-sector in nature. Understanding the development and sustainability of these complex collaborations is essential. The purpose of this study was to explore how cross-sector partnerships influenced the creation and implementation of district-wide high school career academies in a large urban school district.

The key findings across these studies emphasize the importance of structured support programs, particularly mentoring and cross-sector collaborations, in improving academic outcomes for African American and urban, low-income students. Mentoring programs, especially those lasting more than half of the school year, have been shown to significantly enhance grade point averages and attendance rates, providing critical long-term academic support. In particular, work-based and combined tutoring/mentoring interventions help ease students' transitions into high school, fostering higher educational commitment and increasing the likelihood of graduation. Cross-sector collaborations, such as those in career readiness initiatives, also play an essential role in shaping and sustaining educational reforms that promote student success.

Leadership and Personal Growth

Peer mentoring programs have been beneficial for Black and Hispanic high school students, enhancing

their leadership abilities, self-motivation, and personal growth through the act of mentoring others. Mboka (2018) investigated ways in which university students carry out mentoring tasks, as well as the types of activities that succeed or fail in relationship-based mentoring where mentors are guided to establish relationships first, and then leverage those connections to promote prosocial thinking and behavior, remains a relatively unexplored area of youth mentoring. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the strategies employed by criminal justice majors and the behavioral goals they targeted during their semester-long mentoring interactions with elementary, middle, and high school students in a local school district. Using conventional content analysis, themes and patterns of self-reported activities were systematically identified, classified, and coded. The findings indicate that the student-mentors largely engaged in activities targeting known risk factors linked to antisocial thinking, attitudes, and behaviors. These results shed light on the dynamics of this mentoring approach, highlighting the significance of strong mentor-protégé relationships and underscoring the need for further research into the effectiveness of relationship-based mentoring.

Opara and associates (2023) found that peer mentoring programs have shown significant success among high school students; however, educational research often overlooks the perspectives of peer mentors and how mentoring impacts their personal development. Even less attention has been given to exploring the experiences of Black and Hispanic peer mentors from urban areas. This qualitative study investigates the roles of 14 Black and Hispanic high school peer mentors, focusing on their support for mentees and the benefits they perceive from mentoring. All participants attended high schools in an under-resourced urban community in New Jersey. The analysis identified three key themes: (1) leadership development, (2) recognizing their strengths by inspiring others, and (3) the influence of family on their mentoring approach. The implications of these findings for future research and peer mentoring programs aimed at supporting urban youth of color are discussed.

Peer mentoring programs have shown significant benefits for Black and Hispanic high school students, fostering leadership skills, self-motivation, and personal growth through the act of mentoring others. One approach emphasizes building strong relationships between mentors and mentees to encourage positive behavior and address risk factors for antisocial attitudes. In urban, under-resourced communities, peer mentors have reported personal gains such as leadership development, recognizing their strengths, and the influence of family on their mentoring style. These findings highlight the importance of mentoring relationships in supporting youth development, though more research is needed to explore their full impact.

Discussion/Implications

The literature on mentoring programs for historically underserved students reveals significant areas of convergence and divergence. There is broad agreement on the systemic barriers these students face and the transformative potential of culturally relevant mentoring programs in fostering academic success and equity (García & Weiss, 2019; Horvath, et al., 2018). Studies highlight the importance of collaborative, community-engaged approaches and diverse mentoring models to address local needs and promote systemic change (Gordon et al., 2009; Grey, 2019; Hurd & Seller, 2013). However, the literature diverges on the optimal structure and duration of these programs, the balance between academic outcomes and personal development, and the depth of research on long-term impacts (Malin et al, 2020; Mboka, 2018). These points of convergence and divergence underscore the complexity of designing effective mentoring initiatives while affirming their critical role in educational reform.

Areas of Convergence

There is a broad consensus that historically underserved students face systemic barriers and resource gaps that hinder their academic and professional success. The literature emphasizes the need for reforms that provide equitable access to

support and pathways for achievement (Mboka, 2018; Opara et al., 2023). The studies agree on the importance of culturally relevant or responsive mentoring programs. Equitable mentoring programs serve as a critical intervention, offering culturally responsive guidance, support, and resources to affirm students' identities and create pathways to achievement (Beals et al., 2021; Grey, 2019; Lyons & McQuillin, 2019). Community-engaged research provides a collaborative framework for designing and implementing these programs. By fostering partnerships among administrators, universities, and community organizations, mentoring initiatives can be rooted in the lived experiences and cultural wealth of the communities they serve. Programs such as the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) highlight the positive outcomes of using cultural pride and an Afro-centric approach to enhance academic attachment and success among African American male students (Gordon et al., 2009). Across studies, mentoring is linked to improved academic performance, such as higher grade-point averages and increased attendance (Gordon et al., 2009; Grey, 2019; Hurd & Seller, 2013). Both tutoring/mentoring programs and work-based mentoring interventions show long-term academic benefits, including helping students transition into high school and increasing graduation rates.

The literature highlights how mentoring programs contribute to academic success and promote diversity in the teaching profession (Cole, 1986; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Schroth & Helfer, 2018). Community organizations and educational institutions must work together to co-create mentoring models that address local needs, dismantle systemic inequities, and amplify the voices of historically underserved students and their families. Universities and future educators play a pivotal role in advancing this work by participating in and leading these programs, connecting academic research with community-driven solutions. Through community-engaged partnerships, mentoring programs can integrate diverse models—from peer-led to professional structures—and incorporate ongoing research to refine their impact (Hagler et al., 2023). These programs not only address

immediate challenges but also contribute to long-term systemic change by empowering students to thrive and lead in educational spaces. Stakeholders must invest in these transformative programs, recognizing their role in creating equitable pathways, strengthening community ties, and fostering socially just educational systems.

Areas of Divergence

While many studies endorse culturally relevant mentoring, there is some variation in the models of implementation (Cross & Cross, 2008; Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Linnehan, 2001). For instance, some studies emphasize peer mentoring as a critical tool, while others focus on adult-led or professional mentoring programs. The exact structure and duration of effective mentoring programs can differ. While academic outcomes are a primary focus in most studies, some literature places more emphasis on the personal development of mentors and mentees, such as leadership growth and identity development (Mboka, 2018; Opara et al., 2023). Others highlight academic performance as the key metric for success. The balance between these two aspects can differ across studies. Although mentoring programs are generally seen as beneficial, the literature diverges on the depth of research into the long-term impacts of these relationships, particularly peer mentoring. Some studies call for more research to fully understand how mentoring influences not just academic outcomes but also long-term personal and professional trajectories. In summary, the literature converges on the importance of culturally relevant mentoring and its positive impact on academic and personal outcomes (Gordon et al., 2009; Somers et al., 2016). However, it diverges on the specific models and the relative emphasis on academic performance versus personal growth, with a call for further research on long-term effects.

Identifying Gaps in the Literature

While mentoring has been widely recognized for improving immediate academic outcomes such as GPA and attendance, there remains a significant gap in understanding its long-term effects. Existing research

provides limited insight into how mentoring impacts students' futures beyond high school, including their college enrollment, career trajectories, and personal development into adulthood (Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Raposa et al., 2019; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). To address this, future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach, tracking mentees over several years to assess the sustainability of mentoring benefits. This would help determine whether mentoring leads to lasting academic and professional gains, or whether its positive effects diminish over time. Additionally, exploring how mentorship influences life skills such as resilience, leadership, and self-advocacy could provide a fuller picture of its role in shaping not just academic but personal success.

The existing literature focuses on the effects of mentoring for Black and Hispanic students, which leaves a gap in understanding its impact on other underserved groups such as Indigenous students, immigrant populations, and those from low-income families. These groups may face different challenges and may respond differently to mentoring programs based on their unique cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Expanding research to include these groups will allow for more comprehensive strategies tailored to their specific needs. Additionally, there is some divergence regarding the most effective mentoring models—whether peer mentoring or adult-led/professional mentoring yields better results. Further research is needed to understand how different models work across various populations and contexts, and to identify the key elements that make these approaches successful. This could lead to more adaptable and effective mentoring programs that address the diverse needs of historically underserved students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mentoring programs grounded in frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and Identity Development Theory (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1990) serve as transformative tools for promoting equity and supporting the academic and personal growth of Black

and Brown students. By addressing systemic inequities, CRT provides a lens to dismantle structural barriers, while Community Cultural Wealth highlights the value of students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences as powerful assets. Identity Development Theory emphasizes the importance of affirming racial and cultural identities, fostering a sense of belonging and confidence critical for success in educational spaces.

Culturally responsive mentoring programs rooted in these frameworks create environments that not only address immediate academic needs but also support long-term career aspirations (Gershenson et al., 2022). For students in under-resourced urban communities, these programs serve as vital mechanisms for overcoming systemic challenges such as resource inequities, underrepresentation, and discriminatory practices (Garcia et al., 2021). By leveraging cross-sector collaborations and systemic reforms, mentoring programs ensure that Black and Brown students have access to the guidance, opportunities, and resources necessary to thrive academically and professionally.

Peer mentoring programs, in particular, exemplify these principles by fostering leadership skills, self-motivation, and personal growth among students of color. Grounded in strong, positive relationships, these programs encourage prosocial behaviors, reduce risk factors, and help students recognize and leverage their strengths. Peer mentors, especially in urban communities, benefit personally by developing leadership skills and drawing on familial and cultural influences to shape their mentoring approaches (Paris & Alim 2017). These outcomes align with Community Cultural Wealth by affirming the unique value of students' backgrounds and leveraging them to create meaningful mentoring relationships.

Ultimately, mentoring programs guided by CRT, Community Cultural Wealth, and Identity Development Theory address the structural barriers faced by Black and Brown students while promoting academic success, personal growth, and leadership development. By empowering students with the tools to navigate higher education and beyond, these programs

play a critical role in fostering a more equitable and inclusive future for historically underserved communities. Through targeted, culturally responsive efforts, mentoring programs not only address immediate needs but also create pathways to transformative change in education and society.

Call to Action

The authors call on educators, school districts, policymakers, and higher education institutions to collaborate in building robust pathways for students of color to enter the teaching profession through the principles of CEnR. This approach emphasizes the importance of co-creating solutions with communities, leveraging local knowledge, and fostering partnerships that promote equity and shared accountability (Smith et al., 2022). Efforts should include providing resources for peer and professional mentoring, offering scholarships and financial support for education degrees, and establishing collaborative partnerships between high schools, teacher preparation programs, and community organizations.

By embedding CEnR practices, stakeholders can design mentoring programs that are both culturally responsive and tailored to the needs of students of color, ensuring alignment between academic success, personal development, and community impact (Luger et al., 2020). Administrators, universities, community organizations, and aspiring educators each bring unique perspectives influenced by their roles, priorities, and goals. Addressing these diverse viewpoints through transparent communication and shared decision-making is essential for developing mentoring models that are effective, inclusive, and sustainable (Smith et al., 2022).

Stakeholders of mentoring programs often bring diverse perspectives, influenced by their roles, priorities, and organizational goals. Administrators, universities, community organizations, and future educators may differ on preferred models, outcome metrics, and engagement strategies (Luger et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2022). Understanding these differences is essential for fostering collaboration and creating

mentoring programs that balance academic success, personal development, and community impact.

1. K-12 Administrators

- Preferred Models: Administrators may face differing perspectives on whether peer mentoring, adult-led, or professional mentoring programs are the most effective model to implement. Decisions often depend on available resources, school culture, and the perceived needs of students.
- Outcome Metrics: Some prioritize academic outcomes such as grades and attendance, while others value personal development, including leadership and identity growth.
- Program Design: Perspectives vary on the ideal duration and structure, with some advocating for short-term solutions and others supporting sustained, long-term mentoring initiatives.

1. Universities

- Focus on Research: Universities often emphasize evidence-based practices but may diverge on how much attention to give to the academic versus personal development outcomes of mentoring programs.
- Engagement in Mentoring: Differences may arise in how universities involve teacher preparation programs, with some prioritizing the integration of mentoring as a required experiential learning component, while others may offer it as an optional or extracurricular initiative.
- Commitment to Impact Analysis: Institutions vary in prioritizing short-term versus longitudinal research on mentoring's influence on educational and career outcomes.

2. Community Organizations

- Implementation Models: Community organizations might have different views on which mentoring approaches align best

with their missions. Some may advocate for culturally rooted, peer-led mentoring programs, while others might prefer professional mentoring models involving local educators or community leaders.

- Implementation Priorities: Organizations may prioritize community-specific goals, such as identity affirmation or cultural pride, over standardized academic metrics, leading to divergent implementation strategies.
- Resource Allocation: There may be variation in how organizations allocate resources, with some focusing on intensive, small-scale programs and others favoring broader, less resource-intensive initiatives.

3. Future Educators

- Mentoring Roles: Aspiring educators may differ in their views on their roles as mentors, with some favoring peer mentorship with younger students and others preferring to act as mentees themselves under professional guidance.
- Focus Areas: Future educators might prioritize either personal growth (e.g., leadership and self-awareness) or academic outcomes, depending on their own professional goals and the mentoring frameworks they are exposed to during their training.
- Engagement in Research: Some future educators may be interested in contributing to research on mentoring, particularly regarding long-term impacts, while others may focus more on practical application within schools.

Investing in targeted support for students who aspire to become educators not only increases the number of teachers in the United States but also ensures the teaching workforce reflects the diversity of the student population (Sleeter, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2018; Rafa & Roberts, 2020). By embracing community-engaged research as a guiding framework, we can cultivate the next generation of educators who will lead

and inspire future learners while addressing systemic inequities and advancing educational justice.

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