

Examining Black & Hispanic Adolescent Academic Achievement: The Study of Adolescent Resiliency (S.O.A.R.)

All students' achievement and motivation decreases during the transition into adolescence¹. Adolescence marks the beginning of a downward trend in achievement and factors linked to achievement such as engagement, motivation and school attachment^{1,2,3,4,5}. Children are, at this time, experiencing a number of developmental changes. As children begin to shape their identity, they begin to be more influenced by peers and less influenced by their parents. Understanding how environmental influences (such as peers, parents) and motivational influences (such as classroom engagement) affect adolescent achievement can provide information about how to counteract decreases in adolescent achievement in school as they transition to middle school.

Although there is extensive research examining these influences on achievement and motivation on normally achieving White adolescents^{5,6,7,8,9}. There has been less attention devoted to Black and Hispanic students surrounding these topics^{10,11,12,13}. Considering the discrepancies in achievement between White students and students of color, beginning to understand how these factors can assist youth of color to achieve academically is needed.

Program Goals

The Study of Adolescent Resiliency (S.O.A.R.) aimed to answer several questions surrounding the achievement and motivation of adolescents. Specifically, how engagement in school, attitudes and beliefs about school, parental involvement and peer relationships may serve as positive predictors of achievement for youth of color.

The S.O.A.R. Study Examined:

- How beliefs related to achievement and level of school engagement affect achievement of Black

- and Hispanic adolescent students
- The effect of parental involvement in the achievement of Black and Hispanic adolescent students
- The impact of peers beliefs and attitudes about achievement and their influence on Black and Hispanic adolescents achievement and motivation

Program Description

S.O.A.R. were collected in 3 middle schools in one city and a small town from 375 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. Information from students about their grades, beliefs about achievement, and their parents and peers beliefs about achievement was gathered. Additionally, information was gathered from teachers about student behavioral engagement within the classroom.

Following data collection, the researchers examined the relationships between the data collected in separate samples of Black and Hispanic youth.

S.O.A.R. Findings

Peer and Parent Influences on Black Youth's Achievement

- The most influential component of Black adolescent achievement is high levels of behavioral engagement. Our results suggest that more a student puts forth effort in class, participates in class discussions, and focuses on school work the higher their achievement scores.
- Peers and parents both influence how Black adolescents value achievement.
- Contrary to prior studies, we found that many Black student's peers supported education. The more students perceive that their friends support them academically, follow school

norms, and have high aspirations the more likely the student is to hold values and beliefs that school will be important and useful for their future, both in general and as specifically related to economic benefits of their education.

- If adolescents perceive that their parents believe doing well in school is important, adolescents tend to hold higher values and beliefs about the general importance of school and beliefs about the economic benefit of their education.

Peer and parental Influence on Hispanic Youth's Achievement

- The most influential component of Hispanic adolescent achievement is high levels of behavioral engagement.
- Similar to Black peers, the more Hispanic students perceive that their friends support them academically, follow school norms, and have high aspirations the more likely the student is to hold values and beliefs that school will be important and useful for their future, both in general and as specifically related to economic benefits of their education.
- Similar to their Black peers, Hispanic adolescents perceive that their parents believe doing well in school is important, adolescents tend to hold higher values and beliefs about the general importance of school and beliefs about the economic benefit of their education.

Conclusions

- The current series of studies suggests that engagement within the classroom is the biggest factor needed to promote success of youth of color within the classroom.
- Additionally, it should be noted that peers have a significant influence on school engagement and achievement.
- Furthermore, parents values of education influence engagement and achievement in both Black and Hispanic populations.

What can parents and teachers do?

- Teacher-student relationships play an important role in creating a safe and supportive environment for students to learn¹⁴. The environment created by this connection has been identified as a predictor of student engagement and subsequent achievement¹⁵. Additional studies have also identified the link between the teacher-student relationship and student engagement^{14,16,17}.
- Develop teacher skills to cultivate strong, positive relationships with students and the promotion of self-autonomy within the classroom. A supportive classroom environment is very important. It appears from developing these skills teachers may be more likely to create an environment that is highly conducive to youth of color's involvement and engagement in school.
- Target the cultivation of achievement values include highlighting the successes of minority youth within the school setting to reinforce academic success.
- Invite successful professionals of color to mentor youth while highlighting the importance of education to their current level of success may begin to shape negative perceptions minority adolescents possess about the benefits of education.
- Encourage the development of positive and academically supportive peer relationships through interventions such as peer-wide tutoring and involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Create opportunities for youth in interact with pro-social peers allows for the cultivation of relationships with supportive youth.
- Providing explicit strategies to encourage the continued involvement of parents and parental academic socialization will assist with maintaining the academic success of minority youth.

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