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## THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND THE CALIFORNIA BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENT FOR TEACHING

Willie C. Thomas II  
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THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND THE CALIFORNIA BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENT  
FOR TEACHING

By

Willie Charles Thomas, II

A Dissertation Submitted to the

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In Partial Fulfillment of the

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Educational and Organizational Leadership

University of the Pacific  
Sacramento, California

2022

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THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND THE CALIFORNIA BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENT  
FOR TEACHING

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By

Willie Charles Thomas, II

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is, first and foremost, dedicated to my parents, Mr. Willie C. Thomas, Sr. and Mrs. Esther L. Thomas. As Andre Crouch sang in my childhood, “How can I express my thanks for the things you have done for me?” The love you have for each other shined through my four sisters and me. My father, the wisest man I know, served as my rock of wisdom and common sense. So many times, his advice has been my basis for making life decisions and facing challenges successfully. My mother is my heroine as she battles the limitations and challenges of Parkinson’s disease. My mother, a remarkable woman of God, I call for inspiration as my best friend and biggest fan. Her passionate love for God and family empowered us all to follow her example. My mother has a wall-sized library; her love for reading was a special gift to me. So I could avoid failing the second grade, she taught me to decode the writing and regularly took my sister and me to the public library, although I would not become a strong reader until fifth grade, when my love of reading began. I dedicate this dissertation to the love of Willie and Esther Thomas, whose power created and made me who I am. I dedicate this to my wife, whose unwavering support and love for the last 18 years have been the “wind beneath my wings.” I know without her that I would not be here. I pray to inspire you to dream and make it a reality for my children and grandchildren. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my sisters, a group of powerful African American women; my strong brothers-in-law who love them; and the plethora of talented nephews and a niece. I pray my journey inspires you to become and do anything you can conceive.

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# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND THE CALIFORNIA BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENT FOR TEACHING

## Abstract

By Willie Charles Thomas, II

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2022

This study examines why the passing rates of African Americans on the CBEST are the lowest in California at 60%. Madkins (2011) identified licensure testing as a significant reason why African Americans cannot enter the teaching progression. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2016), California has an ongoing credentialed teacher shortage. An even more significant need is for teachers of color. According to the California Department of Education (2021), 60% of the state's educator workforce is White, while the state student body, multicultural and multilingual, is only slightly more than 22% White. While licensure testing for teachers is required in all 50 states, it is well documented that it negates teacher diversity (Brown, 2005; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Sleeter, 2016). The research confirms how it effectively curtails the number of African American educators (Behizadeh & Neely, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Petchauer, 2012). To clarify why the CBEST is so difficult for African Americans, I used a narrative inquiry with a counter-narrative framework. The inquiry describes the lived experiences of African American applicants in order to interrogate the CBEST's impact on prospective and current African American teachers in California.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Teacher Distribution**

Jamilla has wanted to be a teacher since she was a child because her mother was a teacher. Although she has a master's degree, she works as a paraprofessional. She has taken the California Basic Skills Test 10 times but cannot earn a high enough score to attend a teacher preparation program.

This inquiry explores how African Americans aspiring to become teachers encounter structural racial injustice within California's teacher licensure testing. Using critical race theory as the analytical framework through a narrative analysis methodology, this exploration analyzes their seemingly isolated experiences in order to confront the dominant narrative of innate intellectual deficiency. This study examines a fundamental barrier to diversifying California's teachers, especially increasing the number of African American teachers. All candidates to teach must earn a passing score on basic literacy skills assessment known as the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST). About 30% of African American applicants were unable to become teachers from 2012 to 2017 due to low cut-off scores on the CBEST (Taylor, 2021). Currently, African Americans comprise 3.9% of California teachers, a state with a predominant student body of color. This chapter examines the teacher shortage as an international and local phenomenon. Teacher preference will also be considered in how it impacts schools, looking at how teacher testing maintains the African American teacher shortage, thus impacting impoverished schools.

## **International Phenomena**

Education has a disconcerting shortage of its most indispensable resource: teachers. At the macro level, teacher shortages are occurring not just in the United States but throughout the world (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2010). Behrstock-Sherratt (2016) asserted that teacher shortages exist globally regarding equitable access to education. The United States, in some ways, is a microcosm of the global endeavor to educate. The American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) conducts an annual survey of crucial Teacher Certification Programs and school districts across the nation. In 2016-17, almost 70% of the respondents to the survey reported more vacancies than candidates for the school year (Sutcher et al., 2019). The survey may be a statistical oversimplification, but it indicates a need for more teachers across the nation.

## **Local Phenomena**

**New teachers' preference.** Many teachers tend to prefer jobs geographically germane to and reflective of their personal experience, which creates a pernicious challenge to staffing high-needs schools. Most instructional vacancies are filled by new teachers who acquire jobs within their teacher education program's general vicinity. Goldhaber et al. (2020) reported that districts closer to teacher education programs and that host student teachers have fewer staffing challenges. Many new teachers also return to the K-12 district where they attended school as a student. Engel and Cannata (2015) demonstrated how new teachers usually seek employment near their extended family. These teachers desire to work in organizations that reflect their lived experiences and worldview (Cannata, 2010). Female teachers prefer to work in schools within a short commuting distance from their homes (Engle & Cannata, 2015).

**Decision makers.** The geographical importance of where teachers apply and where administrators prefer to hire emphasizes the complexity of the teacher shortage in the United

States. Highly qualified teachers usually accept the most attractive offer within a preferred locale and may even forgo an offered position if it does exist in their sought locality (Boyd et al., 2013). In a direct correlation, administrative decision-makers seek teachers who are reflective of their local environs, mostly former students. Even when principals are trained in research-based hiring processes, they tend to hire based upon their perceptions and impressions (Kimbrel, 2019). Rutledge et al. (2008) demonstrated how failing to hire effective teachers results in costly attrition and replacement that disrupts student achievement. The teacher shortage is far more complicated than just not having enough teachers credentialed in critical areas and finding teachers who will work in each area.

**Hiring locales.** Districts and individual schools located in impoverished rural or urban areas have the most significant staffing challenges, as they are unable to recruit or retain highly qualified teachers. Schools face significant teacher mobility that have socio-economic challenges like poverty, high family mobility, and an increasing number of African American and Latino students (Feng & Sass, 2017; Jacob, 2007). Rural schools struggle to recruit teachers, while urban schools are unable to retain them (Boyd et al., 2005; Podolsky et al., 2019). Urban teachers, who tend to be African American teachers, leave the profession at higher rates than their White counterparts (Alvarez et al., 2020).

A rural school district's geographical isolation influences teacher candidates not to consider what such a district has to offer (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012). Geographical location may limit living accommodations, and compensation packages may be smaller compared to suburban and urban openings (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). New teachers tend to seek employment in or near their former school districts, while rural high school graduates tend to move away even to other rural areas, an effect known as out-migration (Boyd et al., 2003;

Reininger, 2012). Out-migration refers to how the more academically capable students tend to move seeking opportunities away from their rural origins (Moeller et al., 2016). Rural communities are challenged with recruiting teachers externally and are confronted with a tendency of their own former students relocating to teach (Reininger, 2012). Low-income rural schools are unable to fill teaching vacancies, while low-income urban schools are unable to keep the teachers they hire.

Urban schools in poor neighborhoods reflect the abysmal social-political conditions of the neighborhood (Eckert, 2013). Urban schools tend to attract new teachers, even high-performing teachers, but cannot keep them because of the overwhelming social conditions, which contribute to constant staff turnover (Boyd et al., 2005). Rothstein (2015) found that schools located in lower social and economic areas require teachers to teach in exacerbated circumstances of unfocused parent support, academic divides greater than a year of instruction, and lack of exposure to mainstream linguistic and literary norms. Redding and Henry (2018) observed that teacher turnover is predictive in more impoverished schools located in urban areas. Chambers Mack et al. (2019) found that teachers leave due to a weak school climate, exclusionary work cultures, and inadequate instructional preparation. Donaldson (2009) posited that emphasizing preparation at a premier institution cannot replace the need for professional nurturing to avoid teacher attrition.

**Teacher attrition due to preference.** Teacher attrition longitudinally fosters underachievement in students of color due to the lack of consistency in classroom instruction (Lee & Mamerow, 2019). According to Chambers et al. (2019), teacher attrition is the most influential factor in organizational commitment. Shore and Martin (1989) asserted that organizational commitment may not be as significant for professionals who perceive their initial

job to be their preferred position. Teachers who prefer to teach students reflective of their own background eventually transfer to other schools, apply for positions in other districts, or leave the profession (Boyd et al., 2003). Boyd et al. (2005) reported that White teachers in New York were twice as likely to transfer or leave the profession in a manner proportionate to the increase in number of African American students at their school. Jackson (2009) quantified how in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools of North Carolina, the most qualified White teachers left schools as the number of African American students increased due to busing. Ronfeldt et al. (2016) stated that teachers prefer to teach in familiar environments, which fosters fewer teachers in predominantly African American schools because there are fewer college graduates from those schools. The teachers' preference for familiar surroundings and instructional environments underscores the teacher shortage complexity in schools serving many African American students.

***Teacher retention or teacher preference.*** Teacher retention is not only about what schools need but also about what teachers prefer. Educators seem inclined to work in settings similar to their own background and experiences (Boyd et al., 2003). Cannata et al. (2017) observed that hard-to-staff schools are constrained even further by the preferences of teachers. A contributing factor to teacher attrition in schools with the highest needs may be that the teachers are not committed to the communities where they were initially hired, as the community did not reflect them, so they seek schools that do (Chambers et al., 2019). Teacher and student demographics demonstrate how much African American teachers are needed in response to teacher preference. Since many teachers seek to work in settings reflective of their cultural background, the teacher shortage for schools of color is not about just acquiring effective teachers but retaining teachers who desire to serve students of color over time (Reininger, 2012; Watson, 2018). As the demographics demonstrate, with approximately 80% of the



administrators and teachers identifying as White, teacher preference for familiar environs tends to systemically reinforce teacher inequities in schools that have many students of color, particularly African American students (Billingsley et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2017).

### **Demographics**

The United States society is racially transforming from a White majority to an all-encompassing heterogeneity of racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Our current monocultural, monolingual educational process does not serve our national interest. For the United States to continue as a global leader, it will need to embrace and reflect within the teacher workforce the growing diversity in our national population. The racial identity of students demonstrates the demographic change in overall racial identity. Students racially categorized as White are now 51% of the population, Hispanic students are the most significant contributors to our racial shift at 25%, and the remaining include 14% African American, 5% Asian, 4% multiracial, and 1% indigenous people (de Brey et al., 2019). In 2016, the Department of Education decried the dearth in teacher diversity, which had only incrementally changed in 15 years as cited in de Brey et al., 2019). Nationally, there is no racial majority in school-age children; about half do not identify as White. Over 80% of teachers and administrators identify as White (de Brey et al., 2019). The racial identities of teachers in the 2014 school year showed that 79% identified as White, 8% as African American, 9% as Hispanic, and 4% as other. The diversity of principals was similar in the 2014 school year, 71% described themselves as White, 17% as African American, 10% as Hispanic, and 3% as other.

It is projected that America will no longer have a racial majority by 2050; school-aged children's racial data make this evident. The school-age population, according to census data in 2017, showed that 51% of 5- to 7-year-olds identified as White, 25% as Latino or Hispanic, 14%

as African American, 5% Asian American, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4% with two or more racial groups. These changes are attributed to the combined increase of Latino, Asian, and multi-racial children to 13%, while White and African American children decreased by 12%. Latino children increased by 9% from 16 to 25%, Asian children by 2% from 3 to 5%, and multi-racial children by 2% from 2 to 4%. White school-age children now make up 51% with an 11% decrease and African American children 14% with a 1% decrease (de Brey et al., 2019). Our racially diversified future will be dictated by our ability to equitably redesign how we educate all children.

Paradoxically, our 3.7 million teachers' racial demographics reflect our historical tendency to educate as a monocultural society. In 2015, 80% of all teachers identified as White, a 3% decrease from 2003. African American teachers also decreased by 1% from 8% in 2003 to 7% in 2015. American Indian and Alaska Native also decreased from 1% to less than 1%. The Latino and Asian teacher population increased by 4%, with Latino by 3% from 6 to 9% and Asian American from 1% to 2%. Multi-racial, American Indian, or Alaska Native and Pacific Islander remained the same (de Brey et al., 2019). In California, teacher diversity is better with White teachers at 61% and the remaining 39% a mixture of ethnic groups with not one group more than 6% (California Department of Education [CDE], 2021). As we become a multicultural society, it is in the best interest of all children that we eliminate racialized educational practices that contribute to academic gaps. Ultimately, a more diverse teacher workforce may enable schools to understand better how to support and motivate all students in California's ethnically diverse classrooms (Banerjee, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Utilizing the analytical construct of critical race theory (CRT), this qualitative inquiry elucidates how African American candidates experience CBEST as a systemic standardized testing process, which has been shown statistically to be a racial barrier to diversifying our teacher workforce. CRT elucidates racism as a permanent, fundamental criterion in society to propagate and maintain social and economic inequities based on race (Bracey, 2015). It is an oppositional school of thought that advocates social justice for all varied forms of oppression and discrimination (Howard & Navarro, 2016). The provision of counter-narrative and centralizing traditionally marginalized perspectives are key CRT tools to empower and engage in combating racial manipulation (Gillborn, 2005). Whiteness posited as property rights secures the best of societal resources at the expense of others who are not deemed White (Annamma, 2015). CRT is critical of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, and equality, which only serve to preserve the prevailing racial power structure (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Currently, California's policy on testing the basic literacy level of prospective teachers perpetuates White privilege since a superior number of White candidates meet the requirement while it excludes a significant majority of African American candidates (Gitomer et al., 2011; Nettles et al., 2011; Sleeter, 2016). As of 2020, all 50 states certified teachers through examinations to filter out assumed less-capable instructional candidates (Goldhaber et al., 2020; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Standardized test-taking is a required skill to become a certified educator. Some assessments do seem to be able to assess subject matter competence, which is integral to teaching science and math (Goldhaber et al., 2018). However, teacher competency testing does not conclusively predict teacher quality and makes it more difficult for those of

color, especially African Americans, to become teachers (Goldhaber, 2007). Standardized teacher testing is not an effective tool at evaluating instructional or pedagogic proficiency, but it is effective as a racially exclusive process (Angrist & Guryan, 2008; Goodman et al., 2008; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015; Sleeter, 2016).

Many researchers agree that instructional diversity is beneficial to all students, and research has shown pointedly how impactful African American teachers are to African American students (Egalite et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Teacher testing has historically justified unequal pay based on race, and as desegregation was implemented, it ended the careers of African American teachers (Baker, 1995; Watras, 2006). California's shortage of African American teachers is easily explained by the California Teaching Commission (2018) *Annual Report on Passing Rates from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017* (see Table 1). The report reflects a continuing and disturbingly racialized outcome with 90% of 70,000 White candidates passing the CBEST compared to 67.8% of 9,190 African American candidates passing. Baker-Doyle and Petchauer (2015) asserted that licensure testing is the primary "gatekeeper mechanism" to becoming a teacher (p. 3). Due to such racialized outcomes, the CBEST is a problem for prospective African American teachers (Bennett et al., 2006) and a racial barrier to increasing the number of African American teachers.

Table 1

*The CBEST, All Three Sections: First-Time and Cumulative Passing Rates by Gender and Ethnicity, 2012-17*

CBEST	First-Time Passing Rate: Cohorts 2012 to 2017			Cumulative Passing Rate: Cohorts 2012 to 2017		
	N Completed	N Passed	% Passed	N Completed	N Passed	% Passed
<b>ALL EXAMINEES</b>	166,796	112,377	68.7	166,796	137,671	84.1
<b>Gender</b>						
<b>Female</b>	114,702	74,795	66.6	114,702	93,258	83.0
<b>Male</b>	49,927	35,831	72.8	49,927	42,465	86.3
<b>No response</b>	2,167	1,751	82.3	2,167	1,948	91.6
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
<b>African American</b>	9,190	4,198	47.3	9,190	6,026	67.8
<b>Asian American</b>	6,389	4,301	68.9	6,389	5,102	81.7
<b>Filipino</b>	3,542	2,227	64.5	3,542	2,753	79.8
<b>South East Asian</b>	3,304	1,859	57.4	3,304	2,451	75.7
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	699	440	64.7	699	547	80.4
<b>Mexican American</b>	30,595	16,202	54.2	30,595	23,144	77.4
<b>Latino</b>	12,303	6,411	53.7	12,303	8,952	75.0
<b>Native American</b>	862	583	68.5	862	713	83.8
<b>White</b>	70,001	56,062	80.9	70,001	63,767	92.0
<b>Other</b>	10,050	6,028	61.7	10,050	7,579	77.6
<b>No Response</b>	19,861	14,066	72.4	19,861	16,637	85.6

*Note.* From *Annual Report on Passing Rates of Commission-Approved Examinations from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017*, by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2018, p. EPC 4F-11, ([https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/reports/exam-passing-rate-fy-2012-13-to-2016-17.pdf?sfvrsn=2b4a51b1\\_2](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/commission/reports/exam-passing-rate-fy-2012-13-to-2016-17.pdf?sfvrsn=2b4a51b1_2))

### Purpose Statement

In California, teacher candidates must take the CBEST, or they may use their American College Testing (ACT) or Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores in lieu of the CBEST to demonstrate an arbitrary level of literacy regardless of their educational accomplishments as undergraduates (Taylor, 2021). The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to interrogate the normalized mandated testing of basic literacy skills to enter the teaching profession in California from the perspective of African American test takers who are normally marginalized. It is my hope that their biographical experiences will illuminate further what the statistical data clearly delineates as racialized outcomes.

## **Research Questions**

My central question is what causes prospective African American teachers to not persevere and pass the CBEST? Engaging and supporting an accomplished adult learner in resolving conceptual discontinuities or misperceptions as a test taker is a very complicated process. To understand why the CBEST is a highly problematized process for a majority of preservice candidates of color, especially African Americans, a counter narrative methodology with narrative inquiry design was employed. The following research questions helped determine why the CBEST is a barrier for African Americans aspiring to teach:

1. To what extent do African American candidates experience racialized overtones in taking the CBEST (Petchauer, 2015)?
2. What is the perceived role of oppression within the systemic or structural dynamics of the standardized testing process (Howard & Navarro, 2016)?
3. What are the counter-narratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005)?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study was designed to significantly contribute to qualitative research on racially diversifying the K-12 teacher workforce by increasing the number of African American teachers, which will be inherently beneficial to our burgeoning multi-cultural, multi-racial, multilingual student body (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). African American teachers are more apt to teach in diverse schools than White educators. The distinctive role African American educators play in transforming the lives of all students, but especially African American students, is incontrovertible (Dee, 2005; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Specifically, one study asserted that African American students who have an African American teacher in their

first 3 years of school not only perform better but are more apt to graduate high school and go to college (Gershenson et al., 2018).

This inquiry biographically illustrates the African American testing experience as it relates to the CBEST. Testing can be a racially charged experience for people of color who are endeavoring to become educators (Petchauer, 2016). Poorly staffed and imposing testing environments create microaggressions that amplify how difficult it is to overcome internalized self-doubt to pass standardized exams known to be difficult for African Americans (Rogers-Ard et al., 2013; Shuls, 2016). This inquiry sought to interrogate the experiences of African American candidates who, as a racialized group, score the lowest on the CBEST adding to the literature for policymakers interested in enacting change.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Colorblindness**

Colorblindness is the belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

#### **Counter-Narrative**

Counter-narratives do not agree with and are critical of the master narrative, often arising out of individual or group experiences that do not fit the master narratives. Counter-narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to the dominant discourse in educational research (Stanley, 2007).

#### **Counter Storytelling**

Counter storytelling is writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

#### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory is the work of a progressive legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

#### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Critical race theory in education is a scholarly movement that applies critical race theory to issues in the field of education, including high-stakes testing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

**Dominant Narrative**

Dominant narrative acts to universalize and cast dialogues in binary, contrasting categories that support the maintenance of dominant groups. A master narrative is a script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out. Furthermore, a master narrative operates in academia that often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship (Stanley, 2007).

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is first and foremost a way of understanding experience. It is also a research methodology. It is, then, both a view of the phenomena of people's experiences and a methodology for narratively inquiring into experience and thus allows for the intimate study of individuals' experiences over time and in context (Given, 2008).

**Narrative Studies**

Narrative studies is qualitative research focused on gathering and interpreting the stories that people use to describe their lives (Hatch, 2002).

**Racism**

Racism is a system of dominance, power, and privilege rooted in the historical oppression of subordinated groups that the dominant group views as inferior, deviant, or undesirable. The dominant group creates or maintains structures and ideology that preserve their power and privilege while excluding subjugated groups from power, status, and access to resources (Harrell, 2000).

**Racialized**

Racialized social systems are the starting point for an alternative framework. This term refers to societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

**Standardized Testing**

Standardized testing is “a test (as of intelligence, achievement, or personality) whose reliability has been established by obtaining an average score of a significantly large number of individuals for use as a standard of comparison” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2021, para. 1)

**Teacher Testing**

Teacher testing is a state policy to use testing to exclude individuals who would have been considered unacceptably low quality for teaching (Goldhaber, 2007).

**Voice**

Voice is the ability of a group, such as African Americans or women, to articulate their experience in ways unique to it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

**White Privilege**

White privilege is the right or advantage, often unwritten, conferred on some people but not others, usually without examination or good reason and is posited as property rights



to secure the best societal resources at the expense of others (Annamma, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the impact of integration and the need for the African American educator in California's public schools. Next, I present the state's changing student demographic and undynamic teacher demographic that seems to be maintained by an ever-expanding teacher credentialing process. The critical race theory (CRT) framework is presented as a tool to interrogate California's basic skill requirement for teaching, which is very similar to a practice once intended to justify unequal teacher pay in the South and became a national phenomenon presupposed as not racially motivated. At the same time, it continues to perpetuate a shortage of African American educators.

### **Teacher Licensure**

#### **Occupational Licensing**

Occupational licensing has sought to regulate various occupations by enacting laws that limit entry into the profession. A standard method of controlling a profession requires the occupational licensing of individuals who wish to carry out the trade. Licensing tends to raise workers' pay, the cost to customers, and make entry into the trade or profession very difficult. Larson (2015) noted proponents claim that license ensures professional quality and safety to consumers, while opponents assert that it increases the cost to provide the service, making it unaffordable and difficult to enter the trade or profession. Today, roughly 29% of the entire U.S. workforce is required to have a license, and the largest groups of licensed workers are teachers and nurses (Kleiner & Krueger, 2010). Licensing, which plays a significant role in the professionalism of the middle class, is said to promote quality at the expense of equity.

Occupational licensing creates one in four trained practitioners in the workforce; their training supposedly professionalizes quality and protects consumers (Anderson et al., 2020; Blair & Chung, 2019). The perceived public good also restricts employment opportunities and limits economic and geographical mobility (Johnson & Kleiner, 2020). Redbird (2017) posited that forward licensure does not increase wages; instead, it makes entry into a profession a burdensome process, making it especially difficult for traditionally excluded groups like people of color or women to become licensed. According to Kleiner and Soltas (2018), occupational licensing has an overall negative impact. In contrast, Blair and Chung (2019) held that occupational licensing helps make African American men and White women more likely to be hired although their wages may be less than those of their White male counterparts. Although it raises wages and hours, it reduces the size of the workforce. Gittleman et al. (2018) maintained that licensed workers are usually employed at greater wages and may have some form of retirement.

Thornton et al. (2017) explained that changing perceptions of occupational licensing as excessive and costly to the worker and consumers have led at least 12 states to attempt deregulation. In some states, occupational licensing has “grandfather clauses,” allowing existing practitioners to avoid complying with new license requirements while accumulating higher wages and limiting the new entrants into the field, thus reducing the effect of new competition (Kleiner & Han, 2017). Cai and Kleiner’s (2016) comparative study of occupational and physical therapists, two similar professions, demonstrates how occupational licensing limits employment and wages. Kleiner (2015) observed that regulating an occupation through licensing should be based on a cost-benefit analysis of public safety compared to the economic cost. Ultimately, licensing does not consistently serve the public or the entire workforce.

## Neoliberal Politics of Education

The advent of the information age has provided the means to commoditize knowledge through testing. Standardized assessments do not measure the entire academic experience but a snapshot of the learning experience at a particular time. Summative assessments are intended as one of the multiple measures to evaluate academic achievement (Ruth, 2018). The practice of standardized testing has transitioned to one where educators annually participate in an international competition to prove their effectiveness through assessments.

Education, clearly understood by some as a socially complex process, is now distilled into quantifiable results by country and ranked internationally like publicly traded corporations (Aravena & Quiroga, 2016). Like shares on the stock exchange, assessment data dictate instruction as a response to market forces (Bocking, 2019). The focus is no longer on holistically preparing future citizens to engage in society; instead, children are trained to test. Standardized tests are designed to capture how much an individual has learned as measured on the test. In an extreme situation, one test score can define a school as a successful or failed institution or even reward or fire a teacher (Howard et al., 2017).

**Accountability as policy.** Petour and Assael (2020) identified accountability typologies in three forms: administrative, professional responsibility, and market. Administrative accountability refers to adhering to governmental policy. The second, professional responsibility, is premised on regulated professional norms and local governance. The third, results-oriented accountability, refers to school districts defined as a success or failure in the public's eyes based on one assessment score (Petour & Assael, 2020).

The public assumes that a policy like educational accountability is the result of a rational process, evidence used to analyze a problem fashioning a solution shown to be efficacious. As

time passes, the policy becomes disassociated with its political origins, the longer it stays in existence regardless of actual outcomes. As time passes, the policy is perceived as efficient and effective. It is easy to perceive policy implementation as a static problem-solving process (Ozga, 2019). It is far more realistic to conceive of policy as the result of competing interests. In some cases, one side was either able to compromise or one side expended enough political capital to implement what serves its interest.

Power dynamics are always at play in any policy development and implementation. Policymaking, by its very nature, is a political process, as is implementation (Ozga, 2019). Policymaking is a political dynamic that can change at any moment. Especially when attached to a law requiring reauthorization or conflicting interest, policy has garnered enough support to be repealed or changed. External interests attempt to legitimize policy enacted upon opposing parties without regard to internal stakeholders like teachers. Accountability policies in education are presumed to exist due to a rational process proven to promote academic achievement (Lewis-Spector, 2016). Western intellectual traditions have always held numbers in high regard. As such, quantitative measures presented in a technocratic fashion are not usually questioned but accepted as fact even when those facts may not serve the best interest of all concerned, especially children of diverse backgrounds. We can ill afford to educate as we did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The subsequent demographic data demonstrate the greater need for a diverse workforce to serve a diverse student population.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

In 1948, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) was founded to accredit university teacher programs. Then in 1954, it was replaced by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE's main thrust was to

hold all universities and colleges accountable through accreditation on a national scale using a quantitative approach. In response to NCATE's stringent quantitative process, the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) organized a qualitative approach focusing on program improvement. In 2009, the quantitative NCATE and the qualitative TEAC formed the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). By 2014, with new accrediting standards and performance measures, it was recognized by the Council of Higher Education Association (CHEA) as the official accrediting body for teacher programs. A key difference in the CAEP accreditation process is analyzing preservice graduates in the classroom (Nichols, 2020).

### **Teacher Certification**

In recent memory, due to conservative politics and public mistrust of traditional teacher preparation programs, exclusionary policy decisions created a teacher shortage necessitating alternative teacher preparation pipelines (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Even so, there are three ways to become a credentialed teacher, usually after earning a bachelor's degree: traditionally, laterally, and alternatively. The traditional credential process through an accredited university preparation program typically requires student teaching. The conventional candidate co-teaches as a student teacher with an experienced teacher in the classroom. Eighty-eight percent of pre-service candidates enter traditional programs. The lateral licensure entails a detailed screening process per state law to become the teacher of record without student teaching. The lateral candidate commits to completing a preparation program using a certain amount of time beyond the school day.

The third option, alternative licensing, was intended to respond to the burgeoning teacher shortage nationwide and to fill critical subject areas like mathematics and diversify the teacher workforce. The alternative licensing candidate has a shorter preparation program, also without

student teaching. The program provides support to complete licensure requirements and instructional development. Alternative credentialing programs are either part of university programming or provided by an independent entity. By 2011, 45 states offered approved alternative teacher preparation programs, and 12% of prospective teachers were participating in alternative licensing (Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

Traditional teacher preparation programs deliberate on the importance of pedagogy and subject matter. While other stakeholders contend that thoroughly understanding content will be more beneficial to a novice educator, and a preparation program should ensure that candidates have subject matter mastery. A knowledgeable novice can acquire pedagogy through the act of teaching instead of processing theories. The pedagogical focus or knowing how to teach is usually a teacher educator's perspective. A student teacher should already have a firm understanding of the content and be able to learn pedagogy. One acquires instructional methodology, teaching strategies, and how to utilize instructional materials. A key component is the student teaching practicum guided by a professional practitioner. Having an extensive grasp of the teaching process and child psychology provides the foundation for developing a skilled educator. A new teacher, well grounded in pedagogy, will fare better over time than one with a strong subject matter background (Bittman et al., 2017).

**How to become a teacher in California.** The key to understanding the importance and impact of competency testing is to become familiar with the California credentialing process. California authorizes 14 teaching credentials classified into four broad types: general education, special education, designated subjects, and other teaching. The General Education Teaching Credential comes in two types: single subject and multi-subject credentials. The single subject credential usually authorizes middle to high school instruction, and the multi-subject credential is

primarily for kindergarten through sixth grade. The Special Education Teaching Credential authorizes instruction in seven specialty areas focused on physical and mental disabilities. The Designated Subjects Teaching Credential addresses adult education, technical education, business, and industry partnerships. The final classification, the Other Teaching Credential, encompasses credentials in American Indian education; foreign exchange programs; sojourn status for bi-lingual instruction; and person of eminence, one who is an experiential expert in a career field. It also includes university or school district interns (Taylor, 2021).

Examining the General Education Credential requirements in detail illustrates the credentialing process to teach in California. Teaching in K-12 necessitates a non-renewable preliminary credential to serve as a teacher of record. Prerequisites to receiving a preliminary single subject or multi-subject credential are an accredited baccalaureate, demonstration of “basic” educational skills, knowledge of the United States Constitution, subject matter competence, a completed teacher preparation program, and a program sponsor recommendation. The multi-subject preliminary credential has one additional requirement: a reading instruction competency test. A preliminary credentialed teacher has 5 years to meet all educational and programmatic requirements to receive a fully authorized credential, better known as clearing the credential. Clearing the General Education Credential requires completing a commission-approved, teacher-induction program or becoming a nationally certified teacher (Taylor, 2021).

The credentialing process for the General Education Credential is based on four requirements that involve assessing educators. The CBEST to meet basic educational skills requirements is the gateway assessment into the profession. The U.S. Constitution is a required assessment as is the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) for elementary teachers. The California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) demonstrates subject matter



knowledge of the courses taught by the preliminary credential holder. Applicants for most credentials except Eminence, Career Technical, and Business and Industry Partnership Credentials must demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy competency (Taylor, 2021).

### **Barriers to Teaching for African Americans**

According to Carothers et al. (2019), fewer students of diverse backgrounds pursue a college education to become educators, and those who graduate are less likely to choose education as a profession. In a literature review, Madkins (2011) identified two distinct barriers to the credentialing of African American teachers: inadequate collegiate preparation and an inability to meet the professional testing requirements. Rogers-Ard et al. (2013) articulated economic exclusion, standardized testing, and racial bias in defining teacher quality. Kitty Epstein (2012), a teacher educator, described an 11-step requirement process to become a California teacher. It seems one specific obstacle to increasing the number of African American teachers is licensure testing (Brown, 2005; Collins, 1995; McIntosh & Norwood, 2004; Petchauer, 2018).

Those who choose the profession must face the daunting task of passing teacher competency testing that historically many candidates of color have been unable to pass and so cannot enter the teaching profession. CAEP would like teacher preparation programs to enroll higher-achieving students. They would like to standardize the testing, using ACT and SAT scores as a basic skills requirement. Using these college entrance exams would ultimately make teaching no longer a career option for most college graduates of color. By the same token, alternative certification has been the predominant response to the neoliberal teacher competency testing policies. However, it creates another bifurcated process for access to a profession where

teachers of color are sorely needed. Even so, evidence shows a White teacher is more likely to be hired over a teacher of color with the same qualifications (D'Amico et al., 2017).

### **Standardized Testing**

**Eugenics, the birth of psychological testing.** Standardized testing was developed to systematically denote intelligence as an inherited trait with a racial limitation (Au, 2016). Fallace (2016) observed that Thorndike, Terman, Brigham, and Yerkes consistently used intelligence testing to reinforce previously existing eugenic ideologies. As members of the American Eugenics Society, the four scholars designed standardized testing to validate their racist beliefs about intelligence as a fixed inherited trait (Kohlman, 2012). Testing outcomes for existing standardized measures like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Intelligence Quotient test (IQ) consistently favor White examinees demonstrating the racist assumptions of their origins (Himelfarb, 2019; Tefera et al., 2019). Test-takers identified as White tend to obtain the highest scores, and participants identified as African American the lowest scores (Himelfarb, 2019; Tefera et al., 2019). An advisory council member of the American Eugenics Association and a psychologist, Robert Yerkes, led the development and testing of the most extensive standardized test on intelligence known as the Alpha and Beta Army Test (Au, 2016). This test was used on 1.75 million Army recruits, validating eugenicist assumptions that the level of intelligence is a racialized quantity (Knoester & Au, 2017). The data generated from the Alpha and Beta Army Test on mental fitness was analyzed by a statistical unit at Columbia University headed by Professor Edward L. Thorndike, also an advisory council member of the American Eugenics Society (Winfield, 2010). His student, Benjamin Wood, would develop and sell the National Teacher Exam, a standardized test for teachers used in the South to justify paying White teachers more than African American teachers (Baker, 1995; Watras, 2006).

**Standardized testing barrier.** Standardized testing to become a teacher has a negative impact on all teaching aspirants of color, but its impingement is greatest for African Americans. Historically, standardized evaluative instruments have been very effective at removing African American teachers and are proving to be just as effective at preventing African Americans from becoming educators (Brown, 2005; Gitomer et al., 2011; Nettles et al., 2011). Teacher competency testing has been used against African American teachers since the 1940s in response to the NAACP's lawsuits to equalize African American and White teachers' salaries in South Carolina (Watras, 2006). In the 1930s, the NAACP and statewide African American teacher organizations began to pursue legal action to obtain equal salaries within segregated public schools (Baker, 1995). In response to these successful efforts, Wood (1940) perceived this situation as an entrepreneurial opportunity. He articulated how the test was designed to measure intelligence to improve teacher selection, what state credentialing authorities, as in California, still hold as the basis for administering the test. In the same presentation, he stated it eliminated nice people who knew little about teaching (Baker, 1995; Watras, 2006; Wood, 1940). In the North, the test was sold as an impersonal way to differentiate teacher pay, but in the South, African American teachers scored in the lower 5<sup>th</sup> percentile while White teachers did significantly better. By utilizing the test, Southern school districts were able to maintain salary based on race but claim it was due to test scores; this was not held to be discriminatory (Baker, 1995; Watras, 2006).

### **The Displacement of African American Teachers**

Prior to 1954, segregated African American schools educated approximately 2 million youngsters and employed 82,000 teachers (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). In 1960, 45% of the Southern African American population with post-secondary education listed teacher as their

occupation (Thompson, 2017). Tillman (2004) noted how once all legal and political means were exhausted in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, desegregation integrated students, but it resulted in the mass removal of African American educators from the teaching profession (see Table 2). Dismissals, demotions, displacing, and non-hiring were among the strategies used to end the careers of African American educators (Hooker, 1971). In the 1970s, desegregation displaced well over an estimated 30,000 African American teachers, who were fired or not rehired (Oakley et al., 2009). Witty (1982) illustrated African American teacher displacement using Alabama's teacher-to-pupil ratios; the White teacher-to-pupil ratio was 20 to 1 and the African American teacher-to-pupil ratio 43 to 1.

Table 2

*The Impact of Brown v. Board of Education on the Employment Status of African American Educators*

Pre-1954	Approximately 82,000 Black teachers taught 2 million Black children who attended mostly segregated schools.
1954	On May 17, the U.S. Supreme court ruled in the case <i>Oliver L. Brown v. the Topeka (KS) Board of Education</i> .
1954-1965	More than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions.
1975-1985	The number of Black students who chose teacher education as a major declined by 66%.
1984-1989	New teacher certification requirements and teacher education program admission requirements resulted in the displacement of 21,515 Black teachers.
2001	African American teachers represented 6% of the public school teaching force, whereas African American students represented 17.1% of the public school student population.

*Note.* From “(Un)intended Consequences? The Impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Decision on the Employment Status of African American Educators,” by L. C. Tillman (2004), *Education and Urban Society*, 36, 280-303, p. 286, (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124504264360>).

By the 1980s, it became apparent there was now an African American teacher shortage, but in response to conservative politicians who proclaimed public education was in crisis, standardized testing was refashioned as a measure of teacher quality (Garcia, 1986). On cue, the public began questioning the rigor of teacher education programs, and conventional wisdom was that testing would effectively remedy the situation although no research supported this conventional wisdom (Watts, 1985). In the 1990s, although the effect of competency on teachers of color was documented as a statistical anathema to teacher diversity, policymakers increased the rigor (Jones et al., 2011).

### **CBEST: A Teaching Barrier**

Every state has adopted licensure testing to increase teacher quality at the expense of teacher diversity (Watras, 2006). Shuls and Trivitt (2015) noted that workforce quality is not determinable and suggested that states reexamine their licensure processes. Goldhaber and Hansen (2010) observed that teacher licensure testing has very little predictive validity on classroom effectiveness. It has the most significant impact on African American candidates who have the lowest passage rate on the California Basic Skills Test (Keleman & Koski, 1998).

The CBEST operates as a racist barrier much like the NTE, which was used to exclude or discharge African American educators in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Baker, 1995). Currently, the CBEST eliminates or prevents prospective African American teachers from entering the career field (Tanner, 1995). Rogers-Ard et al. (2013) described the CBEST as demonstratively biased against people of color and low-income communities. The test is so racially onerous to toward teacher diversity that the Mexican American Educators, the Oakland Alliance of African American Educators, and the California Association for Asian-Pacific Bilingual Education filed

a class action suit against the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC); they did not win (Tierney, 2011).

### **Why the CBEST?**

California legislators took actions supposedly to create educational equity through accountability. Minimum competency testing for students began in the late 1970s and teacher competency testing in the form of standardized testing began in the early 1980s with the CBEST. It seems the California legislative body was aligned with the conservative-initiated call for education reform as presented in mainstream media claiming that teachers were not competent enough to teach (Kelemen & Koski, 1998; Tanner, 1995; Tierney, 2011). Kelemen and Koski (1998) stated that the CBEST was intended to address poor student performance and perceived teacher incompetence, upgrade teaching as a profession, and improve alleged poor teacher education. According to Taylor (2021), since 1983 the CBEST has been the traditional means of meeting the basic skills requirement to perform the duties of an educator and complete the credentialing process. The Educational Testing Service designed, implemented, scored, and proctored the initial CBEST (Taylor, 2021).

**Basic educational skills requirement.** Anyone applying for a teaching credential, certificate, or permit to perform services in a California public school must demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy proficiency through standardized assessment. This is a California Education Code and Title 5 requirement. Earning a passing score on the following standardized assessments meets the “basic skill” requirement: CBEST, the CSET Multiple Subjects Examination, or passing a basic skills examination in another state. Verifying qualifying scores on the SAT, ACT, or Advanced Placement is another way of demonstrating basic skill proficiency. Preliminary Teaching Credential candidates and university and district interns must

meet the basic skills requirement. Teacher preparation programs can verify basic skills as a requirement for enrollment. The California law specifies that persons in educator credential programs must pass the test to receive a preliminary credential (Taylor, 2021).

**Scaled score.** The CBEST scaled score range is from 20 to 80 points for each section of the test. The cutoff score on each subtest is a scaled score of 41. A total score for all three subtests in reading, mathematics, and writing is a scaled score of 123 to pass. A scaled score of 49 on one subtest and no less than 37 on the other two subtests for a total score of at least 123 is passing. However, scoring less than a scaled score of 37 on one subtest disqualifies the total score (Taylor, 2021).

### **California Demographics**

The K-12 students of California reflect a multicultural and multilingual society. According to the CDE (2021), over 6 million students attend the state's public schools. The current ethnic majority in California public schools comprises Latino or Hispanic students at 55%, while teaching staff statewide is predominantly White at 63%. Boyd et al. (2011) confirmed that many teachers prefer to teach achieving students with a background similar to theirs. Also, students seem to benefit from having some teachers with similar backgrounds (Gershenson et al., 2018). The Fingertip Facts on Education in California on the CDE website (see Table 3) quantifies the state's student diversity with Latino students at a little over 50% and White students at 22%; the remaining 28% is a mixture of various ethnic groups each with less than 10%, including Asian students at 9% and African Americans students at 5% (CDE, 2021). Table 4 demonstrates the lack of diversity in the state's teacher work force with White teachers at 61% and the remaining 39% a mixture of ethnic groups with no one group at more than 6%

(CDE, 2021). As the percentages in Table 3 indicate, there is a significant ethnic mismatch between teachers and students.

Table 3

*Ethnic Distribution of California's Public-School Students: 2019-2020*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
African American not Hispanic	324,496	5.30
American Indian or Alaska Native	30,282	0.50
Asian	575,067	9.30
Filipino	146,501	2.40
Hispanic or Latino	3,381,198	54.90
Pacific Islander	27,195	0.40
White not Hispanic	1,381,737	22.40
Two or More Races Not Hispanic	243,372	3.90
None Reported	53,153	0.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,163,001</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Note.* From *Fingertip Facts on Education in California*, by California Department of Education, 2021, Table 5, (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>).

Table 4

*Ethnic Distribution of Public-School Teachers: 2018-2019*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
African American	11,998	3.90
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,579	0.51
Asian	17,867	5.81
Filipino	4,708	1.53
Hispanic or Latino	64,904	21.11
Pacific Islander	925	0.30
White (not Hispanic)	188,229	61.22
Two or More Races Not Hispanic	2,985	0.97



(Table 4 Continued)

No Response	14,275	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>307,470</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Note.* From *Fingertip Facts on Education in California*, by California Department of Education, 2021, Table 7, (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>).

The overwhelming racial mismatch between teachers and students contributes to educational inequity (Redding & Baker, 2019). The percentages in Table 4 illustrate why a vast majority of teachers in K-12 education are challenged to connect with students who are culturally different, which cumulatively impacts student engagement and achievement (Lee & Mamerow, 2019). Cherng and Halpin (2016) agreed that the lack of teacher diversity adversely affects African American student experiences and outcomes.

### **Teacher Influence**

It is important to focus on teachers and the teaching experience because of its determinate impact on students emotionally, socially, and academically. Lee and Mamerow (2018) found that highly qualified teachers are presumably the greatest determinant of student success although it is very difficult to exactly know what it is or how it operates. Potentially, the most influential actor in determining the definitive outcomes in a student's life as adults are teachers. Gentrup et al. (2020) reported that once a teacher meets a student, the teacher becomes the cornerstone of what that student learns regardless of its value to the student. Kim et al. (2018) observed that teacher impact on student outcomes is indisputable. Teacher quality determines student achievement. Without a teacher, the learner must endure extended trial and error. Teachers create a straight line between student potential and measurable academic outcomes by instructing, guiding, and motivating student progression (Tanaka et al., 2020). Using the Trends' international testing data in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2011,

Blömeke et al. (2016) demonstrated a significant relationship between instructional quality and student achievement. Harris and Sass (2011) asserted that teacher quality determines the level of improving K-12 education, and Hanselman (2019) agreed that teachers are the authoritative school input to student achievement, as evidenced by the distributive inequities between schools.

Teacher quality is demonstrated by creative skill and professional will to engage and change students' lives. Lee and Mamerow (2018) heralded teachers as the most transformative influences on what students decide to do as a career and, in some instances, on the type of person they will become in the future. Teachers are active indicators of student outcomes academically as well as in life. Teachers are essential to our nation's future prosperity. Highly effective teachers prepare students to meet the challenges of the coming era and beyond. Lee and Mamerow (2018) reported that teaching influences life-changing decisions like what courses to study, what college to attend, what career to pursue, all of which dictate income and lifestyles. Teachers can be the determinate factor in what a student does in school and in life.

Teaching is the most significant indicator of student achievement. Currently, a predominantly White instructional staff has not boded well for students of color (Ingersoll et al., 2019). According to Scott et al. (2019), African American students are suspended from school 3 times more often than White students. Also, ethnic minority students face many disadvantages in school, which might be due in part to teachers' stereotypical expectations and attitudes (Glock et al., 2019; Hanselman, 2019; Kleen & Glock, 2018). A major contributing factor to teachers having low expectations as well as difficulty in managing some students is the lack of shared experience caused by segregated cultural experiences (Bersh, 2018; Hauser-Cram et al., 2003). Comparing the ethnic diversity of California's teachers to the California public school student

body demonstrates a stark cultural divide that may help explain the much-decried student achievement gap along racial lines.

### **The African American Teacher Shortage**

The racial breakdown of the current teacher workforce reflects the systemic tendency to exclude and not include. It reflects our past and may condemn our future as a leading nation. Institutionalized White supremacy has created an enormous conundrum. By systemically replacing African American educators with White counterparts in the 1950s and 1960s and structurally curtailing future teachers of color by continually increasing the criteria to become educators, it will take decades to address the diversity gap in teaching. It is estimated that by 2060, White students will comprise 34% of the public-school student population. Brookings Brown Center on Education Policy estimates it would take 50 years for the teacher workforce to racially resemble the national student body (Putman et al., 2016). Our historical occupation with racial segregation illuminates the systemic structural barriers that now exist within the teacher workforce. It is now 90% likely that all primary-school-aged children will have White teachers throughout their educational experience (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020), a subtly ominous reinforcement of White hegemony to children in a supposedly colorblind society. Many teachers are ill-trained to be culturally responsive to students from diverse culture.

### **Race-Congruent Teachers**

An immediate step toward ameliorating racial inequity in education is providing educators who are passionate about serving the students and who clearly understand the life-or-death impact of their role in their lives. A teacher's racial identity does not automatically mean they can make a difference in student outcomes. Still, the data show that a teacher of the same color who has similar experiences and the passion to make a difference are more readily received

by their students and are able to engage them in meeting the educational challenges of being poor in America. Students with the greatest needs are enabled the most when their teacher looks like them. Egalite et al. (2015) found that the lowest-performing students, both African American and White, benefitted the most academically from having a teacher who was race congruent. Rasheed et al. (2020) noted that students with racially matched teachers who shared a similar social background and cultural experiences seem more engaged, more motivated, happier, and had fewer absences, while the opposite was true when they were mismatched. Gershenson et al. (2018) noted that an African American student who has an African American teacher in their kindergarten to third-grade experience was more likely to graduate high school and attend college. Hart (2020) asserted that African American honor students were more likely to pass advanced track courses when one of their teachers was African American. Redding and Baker (2019) posited that African American students tend to score higher on achievement tests when assigned an African American teacher.

### **Educating the African American Child**

#### **California's African American Academic Struggles**

California public schools are ineffective at educating African American students, and a recent state report described their troubling educational outcomes in 2018. The California Legislative Analyst's Office report, "Narrowing California's K-12 Student Achievement Gaps" (Petek, 2020), details how African American children had the worst test scores across grade levels, the lowest graduation rates, and the highest chronic absenteeism rate, about double that of Latino and White students; they were also suspended at nearly double the rate of Latino and White students. The state's achievement gap also widened in 2018.

The report also explained how African American students disproportionately make up lower socioeconomic groups. For example, African American students in California comprise 5.4% of all public-school students but 19% of the state's foster youth and 8.3% of its homeless youth. The economic impact on academic achievement with its racial correlation is a sad reflection on the state's educational and social systems.

### **Deficit Perspective**

Our continued commitment to colorblindness perpetuates White racial dominance in California's instructional workforce. It is characteristic that more than 80% of our current educators identify as White compared to almost half of our students who do not identify as White. The current teacher preparation programs train teachers within a culturally specific educational mindset. Attributed to the lack of instructional success with certain types of students is pathology or social-economic deficiency. There is a tendency to assume something is amiss with the student and not the limitations of the instructional model or curriculum. Therefore, students with distinctly different cultural norms and worldviews do not fit in the current instructional model, although some teachers and scholars have made valiant attempts to integrate or situate within the instructional model strategies to address specific student differences.

Merolla and Jackson (2019) asserted that structural racism is the ultimate culprit in the academic achievement gap since the educational system was designed in the mold of a particular cultural group preoccupied with eugenic notions. They posited that cultural norms about who and how knowledge is acquired are embedded into its institutions and its practices have normalized racist notions. Salisbury (2020) insisted that the achievement gap is treated as the fault of students of color, which shapes how educators address the apparent disparities it reveals. It is like a child who has been badly burned. It is not his or her fault, but it is so visually aberrant

people tend to look away or avoid interacting with them. Instead, our state needs educators to teach where they are impassioned to serve students. As the state report illustrates, the African American student body needs dynamic educators even more. An impassioned educator is passionately genuine in their desire to motivate students who are not performing. Our state population is the most diverse in the nation, but our state's public school educator racial demographics are not reflective of our public-school student body.

### **The Socioeconomics of Education**

Nationally and for 3 decades, the academic achievement gap has decreased, according to Rust (2019), as African American students are continually compared to White students but cannot match their academic progression. Socioeconomic status (SES) is considered the most significant detractor to educational parity (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020; Kotok, 2017). Educational Testing Services researchers Barton and Coley (2007) identified that single-parent households—meaning single income—translates into decreased parent involvement in literacy development, limited school involvement, and the lack of resources to provide high-quality childcare and a literate home environment. The racial inequities are observable in kindergarten and continue to widen throughout their educational experiences. Young et al. (2018) asserted a double marginalization when examining the achievement data focused on African American girls, especially in mathematics and science. Davis and Martin (2018) observed that if teachers do not expect African American students to see themselves as doers of mathematics, then any form of mathematical instruction does not serve its specific function.

Parental income appears to establish a child's entry point into kindergarten based on how much was done to prepare the child academically. Parental income and educational levels seem to be critical indicators of how well a child is academically prepared to enter school and progress

throughout their K-12 educational experience. While parental income correlates to a child's academic progression, parental educational level is an even more robust correlate that shows a child can narrow the education gap but does not resolve it (Henry et al., 2020). Crouzevialle and Darnon (2019) explained that lower parental income usually places a child at an under-resourced school, schools that generally have teachers who have the least experience or are not adequately trained to be effective and who may not have high enough expectations for the children they serve.

### **Gifted African American Students**

Our society's racialized perspective is so dominant that even gifted children of color are not equally or even plausibly served to reach their full potential, creating what is known as the excellence gap. The excellence gap refers to how high-ability, low-income children are prevented from reaching their full potential due to limited access to advanced academic opportunities and differentiated instruction. Researchers hold that gifted African American students are not identified due to racial bias. In one study, White children were 3 times more likely to be recognized as gifted than African American Children (Siegle et al., 2016). Providing appropriate elementary and middle school learning experiences for gifted children assures their success in advance placement courses. Successful students in AP create possible career trajectories that address our national professional shortages in science, technology, engineering, and math. About 25% of high-achieving first graders attend high-needs schools. By fifth grade, only half are still high achieving due to the lack of program services (Crabtree et al., 2019; Sewell & Goings, 2019). A possible remedy to a higher number of teachers of color would be great advocates.

## **School-to-Prison Pipeline**

The racialization of crime and poverty has led America to become the world's largest jailer, with African Americans as the largest inmate population. Cook et al. (2018) agreed that the link to discipline disparities and prison is evident since African American boys are more likely to be suspended for misconduct like dress code. In contrast, White boys are likely to be suspended for vandalism or truancy. According to the report to the president of 2015 titled *Protecting Civil Rights, Advancing Equity*, African American students are suspended and expelled at a rate 3 times greater than that of White students (Lhamon et al., 2015). On average, 5% of white students are suspended compared to 16% of African American students (Lhamon et al., 2015). Scott et al. (2019) documented how the disciplinary gap has widened while the achievement gap has narrowed though not in an effective manner. However, their study seems to show that teacher quality and race is the issue. Implicit bias may play a role, whereas reaction to human behavior is unconscious and in conflict with the trained response. Conceivably, the conditioned fearful response to African American males contributes to the national tendency to punish African American boys more than any other group. Because of the over-reactive treatment, they begin to expect punishment and seek negative behavior.

The ongoing exclusionary discipline has severe academic consequences for students of color, primarily African American boys (Morris & Perry, 2016). Exclusionary practices contribute to the high school dropout rate, which is a critical indicator that a student will become part of the criminal justice system. One biased teacher who seeks to preempt what they perceive as defiant behavior can cause a student significant academic deficiency and significantly increase the chances the child becomes criminalized due to poor educational outcomes (Bryan, 2020; Cook et al., 2019; Gregory & Roberts, 2017). Our structural tendency to racialize education



processes could be our greatest downfall because teachers reflect the societal norms of the greater society.

### **Student Ethnicity Lowers Teacher Expectations**

As the African American educational experience from the Reconstruction period until integration illustrates, teachers play a vital role in children's educational success, especially African American children (Milner & Howard, 2004). Race may play a particularly callous role in how African American and Latinx students are treated in school as they report what seems to be less than positive interactions and limited participation as related to some or all school staff (Voight et al., 2015). African American and Brown students experience less demanding and stimulating instruction in science and math by less qualified teachers. The more qualified teacher can play a key role in reducing the academic divide between them and White students (Quinn & Cooc, 2015). Students' ethnicity may influence a teacher's academic and behavioral expectations (Timmermans et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2015; Van Ewijk, 2011).

### **Critical Race Theory**

If race does not have any biological or intellectual determinacy, why does it correlate with continually deficient educational outcomes? Some scholars assert that a dominant racialized worldview of scholarship and policy is continuously normalized as a universal framework that invalidates contending perspectives as intellectually inferior, thereby marginalizing, or denying, their viability (Bracey, 2015; Gillborn, 2005; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Race in the dominant view continues to progress at deliberate speed due to the civil rights movement. Derrick Bell, a Harvard legal scholar and former NAACP attorney, began to challenge this narrative by telling a different story. He argued that the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision was not a civil rights victory but a political decision that converged with the

interests of the political elite to combat communism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). His scholarship on how racism was not just a result of individual prejudice but was instead an endemic part of the American paradigm formed the bedrock of what has become known as critical race theory (CRT). While CRT scholars agreed with critical legal studies' interrogation of traditional jurisprudence, they decried it for not including oppressive constructs like race (Tate, 1997). CRT began as a legal theory of race and racism constructed to interrogate how race and racism permeate the law and society; in education, it is a tool to address its systemic inequities (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT asserts that race permeates our nation's educational systems governed by the primacy of property rights over human rights and replicating and maintaining inequity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate began to apply CRT to the racialized systemic inequities in education.

The tenets below are utilized to challenge the dominant perspective on the objectivity and color-blindness of the CBEST. It will be used to decry the lack of social justice in the CBEST testing process by validating the experiential knowledge of African Americans who have taken the CBEST, using narrative inquiry to tell their counter-stories: (a) centrality of racism, (b) challenging the dominant perspective, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) valuing experiential knowledge, and (e) counter story.

**Centrality of racism.** The centrality of racism was initially articulated by Derrick Bell (1992), who, considered an original CRT theorist, coined the phrase racial realism, "African American people will never gain full equality . . . acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status . . . frees us to imagine (fulfilling and triumphant) racial strategies" (p. 373). Racism continues to exist like the roots of a chopped-down deciduous tree, which resprouts through the stump and network of roots. A grove of tiny plants thus has replaced one tree. The

Civil Rights Movement architects hoped public school integration would end educational inequity. Bell (1980) argued that the African Americans' aspiration for rights converged with the international interest of the US government. Yet White interests change over time, and African American communities suffer the consequences. Fifty years later, public education has been resegregated without the dedicated African American educators of the past (Karpinski, 2006; Love, 2004).

**Challenging the dominant perspective.** Our society seems to be riddled with examples of decisions made about race as part of the societal structure. Race, a social construct, is one of the ways socially and politically our society determines who individually and as a group has access and the level of access to societal resources. Bonilla-Silva (2015) illustrated the dominant perspective in the form of color-blind racism where individual blatant racist statements are condemned, but policy creating racially inept outcomes is upheld. Bonilla-Silva (2015) gave as examples two elderly White men who made racist remarks and were condemned. Donald Sterling lost his NBA team after his girlfriend taped him saying he did not want her to take pictures with Black men. Also, Cliven Bundy who was not allowed to continue as a Republican operative because he stated, "blacks were better off picking cotton as slaves" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 78). Both men were condemned for making racist remarks, but the Supreme Court's decision to support policies banning Affirmative Action is not rebuked because it claims the society should move beyond race. Verbalized racism is soundly condemned but legal decisions that reinforce racial inequality are not treated with the same ardor.

**Commitment to social justice.** The CRT framework is constructed to interrogate how existing educational institutions and systems are hegemonic and advocate toward inclusionary schema. CRT scholars strive towards social justice in response to the intrinsic impact of race

and racism on education practices and policy. According to Parker (2019), CRT is a social justice project seeking to link philosophical underpinnings with practice, erudition with teaching, and the academy with the community to eliminate all forms of oppression.

**Valuing experiential knowledge.** Historically, the experiential knowledge of students of color has been seen as invalid or having no value in academic research. CRT reclaims this knowledge as an asset to understanding, defining, and discoursing the impact of a racialized society on marginalized people (Bernal, 2002). Counter-storytelling constructs such as family history, parables, testimonios (testimonials), dichos (proverbs), and chronicles centralize as appropriate, legitimate ways to analyze and articulate racial subordination and its impact (Yosso et al., 2009). Garcia and Mayorga (2018) explained how CRT uses the experiential knowledge of people in the forefront using their lived experiences to disrupt dominant ideologies in quantitative and qualitative methodology (Decuir-Gunby, 2020).

**Counter narrative.** CRT founder Derek Bell is well known for using the ancient tradition of storytelling in his scholarship to challenge conventional views about race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Bell's utilization of narrative to challenge conventional wisdom (Clandinin, 2006) describes the narrative inquiry as an old practice that might feel new as it relates to the social sciences. CRT uses the counter-narrative to centralize traditionally marginalized perspectives and as a means to empower and engage all in combating racial manipulation (Gillborn, 2005). Seriki et al.'s (2015) counter-story operates as scholarly narration examining how whiteness is an institutional standard. Callender (2020) agreed that the counter-narrative or counter-story emphasizes the marginalized perspective in contradiction to the sovereign view (Dingus, 2006). Counter-narrative places the experiential knowledge of the African American test-takers at the center of this inquiry (Callender, 2020). Counter-narrative

enables marginalized perspectives to interrogate the dominant narrative in an accessible manner for all to examine.

Even though the CBEST has racialized outcomes, the dominant narrative is that the CBEST is an objective measure of teacher competency. People of color brought a class-action lawsuit against the CTC regarding the CBEST as a discriminatory testing process because it overwhelmingly filtered out people of color. The court ruled in favor of the commission, asserting the CBEST was not discriminatory but a measure of teacher competency. Since the lawsuit did not converge with the dominant legal view of discrimination, the CBEST served the greater good by not allowing less qualified candidates to enter the profession (Tierney & Fitch, 2011). The counter-narrative to the legal decisions is how the CBEST keeps people of color out of teaching.

This study is a narrative inquiry constructed through the CRT lens because race has plagued the teacher pipeline. Like Bell and others, this study utilizes the narrative as the most potent way to convey knowledge and explain the data of an unpopular truth – how the CBEST prevents African Americans from becoming educators.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **CBEST Outcomes**

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2016), California has an ongoing credentialed teacher shortage in Special Education, Mathematics, Science, Bilingual Education, and Career Technical Education. According to the CDE (2020), 60% of the state's educator workforce is White, while the state student body, a multicultural and multilingual milieu, is only a little more than 22% White. It would seem a more significant instructional need is for culturally responsive African American teachers who will empower marginalized students, especially African American students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Farinde et al., 2016). Standardized testing of teachers is a pernicious barrier to increasing the percentage of African American teachers (Epstein, 2012).

In California, prospective teachers must demonstrate proficiency in writing, reading, and math on the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) or have commensurate ACT or SAT scores to become credentialed professionals. According to the CTC's (2018) *Annual Report on Passing Rates of Commission-Approved Examinations from 2012 to 2017*, disproportionate numbers of Mexican American, Southeast Asian, and African American applicants have the highest failure rates. African Americans have the highest non-passing rate at 32.2%, with Southeast Asian and Mexican American applicants at 25%. From 2012 through 2017, 26,520 applicants did not pass the CBEST, and 45% of those applicants were either Mexican American, Southeast Asian, or African American. Testing seems to be a racialized barrier to increasing the number of African American teachers (CTC, 2018).

## **Purpose**

My central question is what causes prospective African American teachers to not persevere and pass the CBEST. More importantly, what will enable African American candidates to pass it? Engaging and supporting an accomplished adult learner in resolving conceptual discontinuities or misperceptions as a test taker is a very complicated process. Policymakers, universities, and teacher preparation programs need to understand why the CBEST is a highly problematized process for many preservice candidates of color but especially African Americans. A qualitative case study design and methodology is employed here to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent do African American candidates experience racialized overtones in taking the CBEST (Petchauer, 2015)?
2. What is the perceived role of oppression within the systemic or structural dynamics of the standardized testing process (Howard & Navarro, 2016)?
3. What are the counter-narratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005)?

The interview questions aligned with particular tenets of CRT and were used to ascertain the impact of test taking in the lived African American participants' experience (see Appendix A).

## **Chapter Roadmap**

This chapter elucidates the application of narrative inquiry through the lens of the critical race theory (CRT) counter-story methodology to investigate the African American experience in taking the CBEST. Initially, the discussion explains how the counter-narrative was initiated through CRT scholarship. Next, I demonstrate the applicability of the narrative inquiry method in the form of the counter-narrative design in interrogating the structurally embedded oppression of racism in educational policy. Finally, I discuss the procedural validity and ethical

considerations in the counter-narrative design. The narrative inquiry offers an individualized perspective on a collective experience of how racial oppression is embedded in what is perceived as an objective process but that has racially deficient outcomes that undermine the aspirations of African Americans who desire to become educators.

## **Inquiry Approach**

### **Narrative Inquiry Design**

Narrative inquiry as a method frames the basis for accessing and articulating the lived experiences of people as phenomena. Like its extended relative counter-narrative, narrative inquiry is a methodological response to a dominant narrative or, in more specific terms, positivist and post-positivist paradigms. It focuses on life experiences as stories lived, told, and reflected upon to make meaning of existence. Unlike counter-narratives, it does not have a direct scholarly origin, as it entered the social science disciplines from multiple academic traditions. Clandinin (2006) observed scholarly efforts to examine social phenomena through the archetype of knowing; the story seems new but is rather old in practice and more clearly redefined in the realm of social science research. Narrative inquiry provides the structure to explore the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics in individual experiences. Williams (2009) noted that narrative inquiry from a constructivist perspective is making sense of your world as you live life, reflecting, and in some form, reciting what it means to you. Caine et al. (2018) added that narrative is the study of experience as it enfolds and unfolds in relationship to time within social and personal space. It is not a smoothly scholarly constructed process but instead a messy intentional process of living stories, being shaped by the larger social and political narrative in context with time and place (Caine et al., 2018). Clandinin's construct of the temporal three-dimensional space is referred to as attending the inward, outward, backward, and forward to



place and places (Clandinin, 2006; Seriki et al., 2018). One key component of the methodology is removing the veil between participant and scholar by collaborating to live, socialize, and converse in the exchange of particular aspects of their storied lives, enriching the knowing of both parties as well as the reader. Narrative inquiry promotes co-constructing experiences through the experiential landscape, as people are not isolated beings but the subject of and in the context of how they live their stories (Seriki et al., 2018). While Hickson (2016) exhorted scholars should listen and seek to understand context and the ways stories are positioned and constructed through a critically reflective practice, their research process should be premised on genuine interaction and a very transparent process. Ultimately, the process should enrich and transform the living experience for all involved and leave an imprint on those who read them.

### **Critical Race Methodology in Education**

Critical race methodology in education (CRME) posits race and racism as a societal normality and malady in education. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRME has five key components indicative of its research process: (a) the interrogating race and racism with other forms of oppression providing the impetus to question and examine them related to people of color; (b) challenging dominant ideological claims of objectivity, meritocracy, racial equality, or neutrality; (c) striving toward normalizing social justice through emancipatory responses to oppression and subordination; (d) validating experiential knowledge as a legitimate, appropriate, and critical means to examine race and racism through storytelling; and (e) using a transdisciplinary perspective to investigate race and racism within its particular current or historical context, providing a comprehensive discourse on how racism impacts people of color (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

CRME places the racial impact on the African American test-taking experience at the center of the study with the expectation to challenge dominant assumptions of scientific objectivity and racial equality and to develop intellectual grit (Parker, 2019). It also operationalizes social justice through counter-narrative as the defining construct in response to the historical and political legality that normalizes racialized inequities in occupational testing (Tate, 1997). Analyzing the fact that African Americans are not passing at competitive percentages is here examined experientially, humanizing the need to address a deficient societal norm that makes African American academic achievement substandard instead of a racist outcome due to a racialized institutional structure (Solórzano et al., 2000). Utilizing all elements of the counter-narrative provides an in-depth and complete picture of the African American experience in taking the CBEST.

Counter-narratives qualitatively challenge the master or dominant narrative about reality and knowing. Since supremacists are attuned to domination, the counter-narrative is confrontational by providing an alternate notion of knowing that puts forth the experiential reality of non-white perspectives as a recollection of knowing, which, prior to this millennium, held sway as valid learning. Storytelling, the most ancient form of knowing and communicating cognizance, has been the basis of CRT scholarship from its inception. Counter-narrative is an instructive approach for addressing issues of racial equity in education because it affords a robust recollection of how racism qualitatively plagues the system. The primary purpose of counter-narrative is to seek social justice by exposing and challenging oppressive power structures as they intersect within institutions and practices (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Rector-Aranda, 2016). It is distinctive from other forms of narrative research as it is grounded in the tenets of CRT, which

presupposes race to control or constrict people of color within the societal structures and processes.

### **Counter-Narrative Inquiry Design**

The counter-narrative procedurally evolves from the narrative inquiry as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who proposed five procedural considerations as Creswell (2007) delineated, placed in a linear order but used as the inquiry dictates: (a) identify the appropriate problem, (b) collect contextual information, (c) gather participants and their stories, (d) actively collaborate with participants, (e) analyze and restory.

**Identify the appropriate problem.** The lived experiences or experiential knowledge of African Americans who have taken the CBEST is very appropriate as the basis for a counter-narrative inquiry to interrogate the racialized outcomes on the CBEST that seem to align with eugenic suppositions about racial intelligence.

**Collect contextual information.** The social, political, and historical context of the African American teacher shortage and how a test like the CBEST maintains and even exacerbates the situation is very apparent in the literature. The statistical data generated by the Taylor (2021) on Teacher Testing quantifies the racialized outcomes and how testing maintains the African American teacher shortage. The literature correlates the statistical data as discussed in Chapter 2. Even so, Buras (2016) asked how African American teachers were displaced post-Katrina, and White (2016) analyzed how Teach for America policies are currently contributing to African American teacher displacement.

**Gather participants and their stories.** The stories were gathered from African Americans about their life experiences in testing and especially their stories regarding taking the CBEST. The focus is African Americans willing to share their storied life experiences in

academic testing and gathering their stories to create field texts and collect any artifacts they might like to share. The data were collected separately and analyzed in isolation, then merged to identify how the separate findings converge or diverge. The interview protocols are based upon Bartell et al.'s (2019) collection of studies on the African American experience within the teacher licensure process. Petchauer, a teacher educator, initially thought his African American students' challenges with passing the teacher licensure exams were due to individual choices and limitations. As he analyzed how to best support his students, he elucidated their experience as a collective struggle within a racialized process. He was soon motivated to move beyond quantitative data into qualitative information to understand better how to address inequities that teacher licensure creates for African American test-takers. This study operated in alignment with his inquiry by interviewing participants but emphasized their perspective in relationship to the CTC's quantitative data.

**Analyze field text and restory.** Hickson (2016) held that narrative research deconstructs language to comprehend the flow and structure of lived experiences focusing on phrases and utterances while critical analysis tends to deconstruct assumptions comprehensively by examining how experiences impact people. Developing a counter-narrative utilizes the CRT lens on racial oppression and validates the marginalized individual experience.

In this format, interviewees construct meaning or interpretations of their life experiences in a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2012). Examining reflections of African American test-takers who become educators or who were not able to do so due to the CBEST generated distinctive themes. Personal narratives captured authentic experiences of African Americans seeking access to the profession of teaching. It also dignified and validated their

constructed meaning from their experiences and its impact on their lives. Interpretive qualitative analysis was appropriate, as experiences told as stories are the primary source of data collection.

## **Population Sample**

### **Description of Participants**

Purposeful sampling involves selecting elements of the population that represent a particular social phenomenon to provide comprehension and insight into that phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The narrative researcher is seeking understanding of how a social phenomenon occurs, its implications, and its interconnections within the societal dynamic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Convenience sampling is a form of purposeful sampling due to limitations in time and resources and allows the researcher to find sufficient cases that meet the predefined criteria of the inquiry, participate in the study, and provide information-rich narrative data for analysis. I recruited participants from the California Central Valley from a county-operated school and its programs, a junior high school, and a high school through networking and snowball sampling by asking local administrators and teacher preparation educators to identify possibly interested teachers. Five participants who identified as African American and had taken the CBEST were interviewed. The interviews were conducted on Zoom<sup>®</sup> to record transcripts.

### **Data Collection**

Merriam (1998) noted that data are collected through interviews, observations, and documents. It involves asking, observing reactions, and engaging a participant in reflecting and analyzing their experience. As testing has been identified by Petchauer (2015) as an event that is part of a very complex lived experience, the participants' reflections on their learning process and testing experience created a rich tapestry for the inquiry. Data were collected over 3 months,

from July to September 2021. Personal contacts through my network were used to send recruitment invitations to African American teachers, prospective teachers, or individuals who wanted to teach. I contacted potential participants via telephone. Those who agreed to participate were emailed or hand-delivered Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved consent forms to sign as well as confirmation notices with statements of confidentiality and anonymity regarding the information shared during and following the inquiry (see Appendix B). The participants were informed the interviews would be recorded.

The researcher conducted the appropriate interview protocols related to the research questions and the theoretical framework for the inquiry and IRB approval requirements (see Appendix C). The researcher also conducted an initial interview and secondary sessions to create a thick description of their experiences related to the CBEST test-taking. The interviews were semi-structured with a protocol of predetermined questions specific to the problem statement. Narrative inquiry encourages participants to tell their lived experiences from their perspectives and not feel constrained from expressing what might be a very emotional memory.

The interview protocols were based on Bartell et al.'s (2019) collection of studies on the African American experience within the teacher licensure process. This study focused on interviewing participants to gather qualitative data.

### **Data Analysis**

Using the theoretical framework of this study, the narratives and reflections of the examinees ascertained the emerging patterns and themes corresponding to research questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom<sup>®</sup> and analyzed utilizing MAXQDA to create electronic outline headings. The outlined headings were used to electronically code the transcriptions. The outlined headings were verified, or new thematic headings were created by

correlating segments of the transcription facilitating composite themes based upon the data. The interview process enabled this researcher to explicate and validate the experiential knowledge of the participants' lived experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2007) advocates researcher reflexivity or self-disclosure of assumptions, beliefs, and biases. The researcher processes beliefs and posits the ethical challenges of being a teacher, allowing the reader to see potential biases that may influence the analysis. When I was a teaching intern in an alternative credential program, I had to retake the math and writing portions of the CBEST. The research process compelled me to reflect on my difficult journey as a mathematical learner. In seventh grade, the math teacher was frustrated because I did not understand the content, which made me feel inept. I was convinced math was just too complicated for me to learn, although I would go on to take high school Algebra and Geometry. In community college, I took college Algebra three times before I passed it. As a teacher, I taught sixth-grade mathematics for years, but I was dependent on the textbook. Upon becoming an alternative education teacher, I was again confronted with my tendency to avoid math. Realizing my avoidance was a disservice to my students, I became engaged in learning how to teach math, resulting in earning a Mathematics Authorization in Algebra. Afterward, I wanted more grounding in research and found the research intriguing to read and understand. My learning and instructional experiences made me realize our educational system tends to blame the learner instead of supporting and developing them to become fluent in math.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

Creswell (2012) defined validation as “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 206-207). Qualitative research

must continuously ensure that the findings and interpretations are valid and credible through member checking. Member checking involves checking in with participants to ensure that the researcher is capturing their experiences as they have been shared (Creswell, 2012). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) discussed the importance of making sure the reasoning of the inquiry reflects the reality of the phenomena through the findings and conclusions.

Scholars of narrative inquiry and narrative analysis have struggled with concerns about validity in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants must share their stories within the free forward flow of conversation. Creating and building a mutual and trusting rapport with each participant is crucial to gathering lived stories (Clandinin, 2006). The semi-structured interview process provided consistency and reliability across my data. The temporal pattern inherent in sharing life experiences hopefully facilitated a familiar structure in all of the interviews in keeping with the inherently fluid and relational nature of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each participant should have felt at ease during the interview as rapport develops. Also, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research. Integral to the process is assuring participants that their identity is confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

The application of counter-narrative inquiry in investigating the African American experience in taking the CBEST aligns with the integration of CRT and narrative inquiry—the applicability of counter-narrative in interrogating the structurally embedded oppression of racism in educational policy. Finally, procedural validity along with ethical considerations in the counter-narrative inquiry was discussed.



## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

### **Experiential Data**

This chapter elucidates the lived experiences of African Americans who have taken the CBEST while interrogating the distinctive racialized systemic barriers that they may have experienced within the process. Their stories and opinions provide a contemplative window into what happens to African Americans within what the dominant culture perceives as a purely objective and straightforward process for qualifying teachers. In contrast, the most recent statistical data on the CBEST clearly delineate that it is not a purely objective measure of teacher literacy. According to the California Teaching Commission's (CTC; 2021) *Annual Report on Passing Rates of Commission-Approved Examinations from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020*, 67.8% of 10,189 African Americans passed the CBEST compared to 91.4% of 68,463 White Americans. The statistical data indicate a vastly different testing experience as related to racial orientation. The qualitative interviews presented here document the difficulties and feelings of oppression in their licensure testing regardless of whether they passed. My central question is what causes prospective African American teachers to not persevere and pass the CBEST. The qualitative data reveal to policymakers, universities, and teacher preparation programs that the CBEST is a highly problematized process for many African Americans. A counter-narrative methodology with narrative inquiry design helps answer the research questions, stated in the Themes section.

The data were gleaned from semi-structured interviews focusing on biographical prose from four men and one woman during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the five participants successfully passed the CBEST, with two working as classroom teachers and the other choosing to continue working as support staff. The remaining two have not been successful but continue

to have careers in supporting people. They were asked to share their lived journeys into desiring to become teachers and their experiences with standardized testing. While each participant had differential experiences with standardized testing, all had closely connected perspectives. For most of the participants, this was a challenging period in their lives, and reliving these experiences was very painful.

Due to the pandemic, I used convenience sampling to locate five participants willing to share their experiences with standardized testing and the CBEST. All the participants had taken the CBEST at least once as required by the established criteria. The interviews were conducted individually via Zoom<sup>®</sup> as required by COVID-19 restrictions. The researcher recorded two interviews via Zoom<sup>®</sup>, and three interviews were conducted via Zoom<sup>®</sup> but recorded on a voice recorder application by Tap Media and transcribed through a transcription application called Otter.ai. The participants are known as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 to maintain their confidentiality (see Table 5). Participants are all college graduates; three examinees had taken the CBEST once, and two examinees were unsuccessful multiple times. The successful participants had been in education for 20 or more years.

Table 5  
*Participant Data*

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Undergraduate Degree	University of Phoenix	Fresno State	Texas Southern	University of the Pacific	University of the Pacific
Years as an educator	0	20+	0	0	20
Number of times CBEST was taken	5	1	2	3	1
Passed	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Participant perspectives and reflections attempt to explain why the CBEST is such an unenviable endeavor for African Americans. I hoped this would also validate their experiences, which have not been seriously considered, and communicate a counter-narrative as to the racialized outcomes of the CBEST passing rates.

This chapter begins by disclosing my positionality as the researcher through my reflection of my standardized testing experiences and concluding with my CBEST testing events. Next, it introduces each participant in their voice through their biographical narrative to ground the reader in the racialized human experiences that, for many, are purely logical endeavors but that are different when one lives a marginalized experience. The chapter elaborates on five themes as expressed by the participants. First, the participants coalesce on three themes explaining why the CBEST is challenging for many African Americans who desire to teach. Next, they identify two experientially lived themes: standardized testing and the CBEST as a testing experience.

### **The CBEST and the Researcher**

As a credentialed educator since 1995, I was aware that there were few African American teachers and just considered myself astute. I did not realize how difficult the licensure testing process is for many African Americans. For me, it seemed an uneventful experience that included retaking the writing portion.

The whole standardized testing process seems more like a game with higher stakes of societal access as you proceed professionally. I remember taking the IOWA basic skills achievement test throughout my K-12 experience in Texas. I am sure I had average scores, but I do not remember it being a negative experience. Entering the military, I had to take the standardized test for recruits known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery

(ASVAB) and scored a little better than average. So, taking the CBEST as a University of Davis undergrad, I assumed I was literate enough to pass, though I was concerned about earning a high enough math score.

I had been advised to study. I attributed my ability to graduate from a UC as enough preparation to pass the test and did not systemically prepare. For example, I had written many a paper in the UC system; though I did not get A's, I passed and assumed I was prepared for the writing portion. Being a voracious reader, I believed I would do fine on the reading and writing portions and decided to read more novels as a method of preparation. Even so, I knew math was not my strong suit, so I bought a book to study the math portion but as I reviewed the material, it felt more like I was just refreshing my arithmetic skills. I did not work through the book entirely. Instead, I identified what I did not automatically recall and covered those portions of the book until I was familiar.

I did not have an onerous CBEST experience; they were both held at a community college lecture hall, and we could not sit next to anyone and could not bring anything in there, but beyond that, I did not perceive any racial slights. I easily passed the reading portion, and I barely passed the math portion. I did not pass the writing and had to retake it. In conversation, I was advised to write a conventional five-paragraph essay with two to three assertions per paragraph. I successfully passed the CBEST the second time. Sadly, I now remember as a district intern that a few other aspiring African American district interns who did not pass did not return the following year. They were informed by telephone at our school site that they could not continue to teach due to low CBEST scores and they did not have the privacy of their homes to process the notification.

## Participants

### Participant 1

Raised in a single-parent home, Participant 1 wanted to become a professional athlete, but sports was not enough to keep him academically engaged. By his junior year, he was not playing football, as his grades had dipped below 2.0. Eventually, as a disciplinary action, he was sent to an alternative high school. His teachers at the alternative high school made him realize there was more to life than sports. He became so academically motivated that he was able to return and play football. Upon graduation, he enrolled at San Joaquin Delta College and played football until his eligibility ended. He then became employed in retail; he still intended to become a college graduate but found Delta College social life an impediment to his academic success and devised a new plan. Upon completing his bachelor's degree, he became a paraeducator in special education and found what he described as his life calling to become a teacher. Since he has not passed the CBEST, he is still waiting to fulfill his calling.

### Participant 2

Participant 2's parents hoped to ensure he received the best education available and enrolled him in predominantly White schools. The lack of racial diversity created a very unfriendly learning environment and he faced continuous adversities in his academic experience. His parents reinforced the importance of becoming college educated, as a high school diploma was not considered an accomplishment as did the indicator of achieving the ultimate seal of paternal approval: a college degree. He initially wanted to become a trial lawyer, but realized his passion for helping troubled kids, especially youth who looked like him. He believed his mother's example as an educator was also a contributing factor. He chose a related career path

to criminal justice where he could inspire youth to make more constructive life choices and avoid the temptations caused by socio-economic deprivation.

### **Participant 3**

Participant 3's single mother raised him with two siblings, a brother, and a sister. His uncle, a prison warden and Christian minister, would serve as his father figure. He received ostensibly continuous and intensive guidance from his uncle. Although the man lived 2 hours away, he became a larger-than-life father figure in Participant 3's life. Participant 3's military experience provided the impetus for growing up and becoming a disciplined young man mentored by his non-commissioned officer with the drive to set and accomplish goals. Upon receiving an honorable discharge, he attended and graduated from college. Upon graduating from college, Participant 3 returned home in pursuit of his dream to become an officer. His opportunity came, but an older officer was racially insensitive, and Participant 3 stood up to him and lost his job. A series of life mishaps including Hurricane Katrina eventually left Participant 3 so distraught he relocated to California.

### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 did not like school as a child and had a very difficult time as an adolescent, although he now realizes there were teachers who cared about him even when he did not meet the expectations of his grandmothers. He realized the calling on his life to help others due to the debt of gratitude he owed three teachers. Their impact was so significant that he was able to see himself in the students he served as a football coach and for a time as a substitute teacher. The most profound influence on his life was his high school educational experience as a football player. He holds his high school football coaching in such high esteem that he currently serves as president of a local high school alumni association. Even though he has successfully earned a

bachelor's degree, he does not perceive himself as a writer. He explained how taking a comprehensive test like the CBEST accelerates his academic apprehensions. His testing experience is fraught with confusion and insecurities. He rechecks responses during the test and not at the end as suggested. He seems so consumed with not making mistakes that time becomes his enemy, and his obviously in-depth intellectual capacity is never truly evaluated.

### **Participant 5**

Participant 5 grew up in the predominantly White but liberal environs of Southern California celebrity. Her school in Venice Beach educated the children of celebrities and was staffed by teachers who were once celebrities themselves. She described her experience as totally assimilated into the American dream. Participant 5 reported that her school was a math magnet school where they did mathematical investigations and presentations. Participant 5's first significant memory of standardized testing was upon entering community college in her mid-40s. Prior to taking the test, she believed her social capital as a former student of a magnet school and her familial network—her mother and sisters were educators—more than prepared her to be successful, to earn a high enough score to begin college courses. Participant 5 had to take prerequisite math courses to prepare her for the college math courses, which belied her prior educational journey as if she were not good enough to attend college.

### **Themes**

While the CBEST outcomes varied with three participants passing the test and two unable to earn the required cutoff scores, their narratives document shared lived experiences and societal concerns. Those shared experiences conveyed a commonality in perspective and reflection emerging into the following themes: barriers to African American teachers, linguistic

barriers, unequal schools, standardized testing anxiety, and CBEST stories, each supported by recent literature. Participant responses also clarified the following research questions:

1. To what extent do African American candidates experience racialized overtones in taking the CBEST (Petchauer, 2015)?
2. What is the perceived role of oppression within the systemic or structural dynamics of the standardized testing process (Howard & Navarro, 2016)?
3. What are the counter-narratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005)?

In response to the first question regarding racialized overtones, two themes emerged: standardized testing anxiety and the chronicling of participants' own experiences as CBEST examinees. The three themes of barriers to African American teachers, linguistic barriers, and unequal schools illuminated how the focus of the second question, societal oppression, exists in the African American experience. The third question articulates a specific purpose of CRT to validate the experiential data of the African American experience in the form of counter-narrative. Counter narratives provide voice to the marginalized African American perspective. Except for one participant, all examinees agreed that the CBEST is far more than just a test of teacher literacy but an ominous process for eliminating aspiring African American educators. In response to the central research question, the emerged themes uncover societal inequities and oppressive testing experiences as the overarching reasons for prospective African American teachers to not persevere and pass the CBEST.

### **A Barrier to African American Teachers**

The role African American teachers could play in student achievement and wellbeing is severely undervalued. Billingsley et al. (2019) outlined the impact of African American teachers as role models who guide African American students through normalized racialized structures,



creating a sense of community and lessening feelings of being the Other. Carothers et al. (2019) held that the lack of teacher diversity is a pernicious barrier to African American student achievement and is hobbled by teachers who are not able to relate to them and who tend not to stay long enough to make a difference (Sutcher et al., 2019). The participants emphasized through their own experiences and perspectives how the CBEST amplifies the shortage of African American teachers.

**The dream.** The participants' perceptions of the test are clearly underscored by Participant 1, who had taken the test more than 10 times and could not earn the required points to pass the math portion of the CBEST. Participant 1 stated unequivocally the feelings of most of the participants using his personal experience and demonstrating the negative repercussions the CBEST has on African Americans who desire to become teachers:

There are so many people before me that, you know, had dreams of being a teacher and had to give it up because of that stupid test . . . Uh anxiety. Like fear. I hate it. Because I've taken it like I'm telling you, I've probably taken at least 10 plus times. Wow, maybe even close to 20 times.

**Filtering.** Participant 2 agreed with Participant 1 that the CBEST ensures that potentially highly successful African American candidates never realize their dream of teaching. Participant 2 explained the importance of teachers connecting with students as the most important aspect of teaching. He asserted tests like the CBEST prevent some very capable people from becoming teachers. Participant 2 described how he observed classmates, who he believed would have been great in the classroom, being systematically screened from the profession:

And I felt like building relationships is more important than the actual curriculum part of teaching. That's another story. But I felt like we miss a lot of quality teachers, that would work with our kids. And we'll have a huge benefit. But I feel like the filtering process exempts them from actually being teachers . . . But still, I think about how we lose so many teachers of color through that process. When I say us, I mean our people of color are people that we're trying to do the right thing and get through the system. But it felt like the system prevented us from doing that . . . And most importantly, my

colleagues around me that I went to school with, I noticed they were having a very difficult time passing the CBEST when we talked about the CBEST. And it was unfortunate because I felt socially and the way they interacted with kids, that they were perfect for the situation. But I know countless amounts of teachers of color that did not get through the filtering process to be teachers.

**“They don’t live here.”** Participant 4 offered an anecdote about how schools that students of color attend predominately have teachers with a dominant cultural frame of reference. Their frame of reference is incongruent with the students they are attempting to teach. He deduced that they do not choose to go into programs with an emphasis on serving students who have different experience. His anecdote mirrored Lauen et al. (2015), who asserted that the cultural disconnects between teachers from the dominant culture and students of color may induce oppositional behavior whereas students resist the teacher’s authority due to professional bias, which lends itself to lower academic expectations, misjudged student behavior ascribing it to be criminality, misunderstood student potential thereby increasing referrals to special education, and virtually eliminating referrals to gifted and talented programs (Crabtree et al., 2019; Harry & Fenton, 2016; Papageorge et al., 2020 ).

I’m on the board at Edison High School . . . And I heard a young White teacher in one of our board meetings and the principal . . . I’m the president of our alumni association . . . So, what happened was . . . (the principal and teacher) started talking about behaviors. So, the young White teacher, and I’m gonna say she was White. They got attitudes about students, but I said, Man, you got to remember you at Edison High School . . . So, I said, “You will never change the culture of this school. And here’s the reason why: as long as you got (neighborhoods like) Conway homes over here, as long as you got Corona Park, which surrounds the school. As long as you have Clay Street over here because all you got is minorities, and anybody comes to our school got to catch our swag because our swag comes from home and our neighborhoods” . . . And she almost chastising the principal, but he’s hecca cool. So, she’s like, yeah, I caught this kid in the bathroom, smoking one of those pins from cigarette pins. I took it from him, and what are you gonna do about that? And he had to tell her, “This is not a school meeting but a board meeting for something totally different. What are you talking about? What am I gonna do about that?” He said, “Nothing you already did it, you took the pin.” I say, “There you go.” So, but see now, the problem is (she wanted him) to do something critical . . . Now if you went to the wrong kid . . . he probably would have cussed (her) out and called (her) a whole bunch of dirty names instead he turned it over to you. Because most

kids aren't giving you jack. And I'm thinking in my head . . . I come from that, not me personally, but I come from that environment. So, I understand the environment. You don't . . . you from Eldorado hills . . . you are coming down you the hill because it's the only job you can get right now, but in the back of your mind you're trying to get up out of here. (Participant 4)

In contrast, he posited examples of African American men who have a cultural connection and passion to teach African American children but are not allowed into the profession due to licensure testing:

Some of your best teachers . . . can't pass the CBEST to teach. I [will] give you a situation, I got a coach that I know, man, like, man, the dude is amazing, but you got him there because of the fact that his interaction with your gangster kids is amazing . . . And they respect him at the highest level, but he's saying, "I passed the CBEST, but the CSET got me all messed up. So, guess what I am, I'm a . . . substitute teacher. CBEST past all that stuff, I just haven't gotten past the CSET." He said, "Man, that thing is hard for me. And you go to school all those years, man, and do all the things you got to do. And then you come to a test that you know; you can't pass after you sat down and did it." . . . Again, example, another one I know is . . . a young man he was I don't know if he passed it yet, but he took it. He was just frustrated. He said, man like some of the easiest stuff at this point in time, and . . . it became the hardest stuff. That's why I said earlier, they should do this while we are in college. Like if you're gonna be an educator, you need to totally take this class, and then we'll give the test to you. So, when you go back to wherever you go to, you can say you pass that part of the test. So, one of my brothers passed everything on the CBEST. Only thing he failed is the math. And I've been trying to motivate him to go. I said, "Bro, do the math, bro." But he's like, "Man, bro, listen. I'm too old now." I said, "Nah, bro. You're never too old."

**Microaggressions.** According to Participant 5, the CBEST does not test content or skill but is a psychological and emotional disincentive to African American candidates. She holds that the licensure testing process is usually inundated with microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Participant 5 asserted that if one does not have the efficacy, the CBEST testing environment, which is littered with microaggressions, serves to psychologically debilitate candidates who do not have the self-

efficacy to overcome them. She explained how she prepares people of color who struggle to pass the CBEST to not focus on the content but on their mindset.

Okay, so for me as an English teacher, I teach students that they are like loaded words that authors deliberately use like hate. Hate if I put that word in there, and that is my response to the word CBEST. It invokes a lot of emotion, it does. It does. It evokes a lot of dissonance, Um, a barrier. Like I'm just trying to think of synonyms that I associate with the CBEST. I associate access . . . That's a word that comes to mind. Inequity. Not me. When I'm saying the CBEST, it's like, I don't see myself. And that I feel like it is. like this institutionalized partition . . . (like) a hurdle . . . Oh, my gosh, I'm definitely aware of microaggressions. Um, all of the above? Okay. Definitely, the micro aggressions the looks that you get when you're there? The beginning, I'm going to say this, because I have tried to prep people to take the CBEST. And because I would say I've done all of this. I've done everything. I've taken the classes at UOP. I've done all the workbooks. Yadda, yadda, yadda. And having been on both sides, participant and then practitioner as well, I would tell people, this test does not test your skill set. I have to change your mindset for you to be able to pass this test . . . Okay, so that was my thing. That was how I prepared people. I'm not gonna give you a pencil. It's not about content. It's a mindset for you to pass the CBEST. You have to go in with the mindset of saying, I'm taking this test, the test is not taking me, and I have to change your mindset to be able to pass this test. If I don't do that, you'll fail . . . tell him that . . . Don't worry about the skills, have to build up your efficacy level, because this test breaks you down so much mentally that my job is to build you up . . . It was knowing the environment so that you can take back some control. Well, (they don't tell) . . . you can . . . take in a snack that you have to take a break and test-taking strategies, get up and take a breath. They don't tell you these things, right. But these are things that I see other people do who are successful, right? I didn't know that I can bring a snack because you just say don't bring any food or water. But then I see people bring in snacks, right? They take a snack, and they eat some protein. And they have some fruit and some water, and they go outside, and they stretch, and they do yoga for a minute. And they come back in. So, my people, those are the things that we have to do as well. Right.

With her own experiences, she corroborated what the other participants have shared regarding the African American acquaintances and friends who are unable to earn a high enough score on the CBEST to become a teacher. She made a verbal list of individuals who should be in the classroom and then posited an example of a person who had taken the CBEST multiple times and teaches preschool due to the licensure testing process.

Seriously, I have so many friends with bachelor's degrees . . . Because seriously, as well, because I've done it individually on my own. Even walking people through the process, step by step, that one-on-one, we're [a] collective culture, right? I have walked so many

friends and I kind of felt like I sent them to the gauntlet, because I encouraged him and said, you have the bachelor's degree, you can do this . . . (I have) experienced this when the people tell you, "I took it five times." Yeah, no matter. They're, like, already ticked and demoralized. They're teaching in preschools. That they're teaching preschool with a bachelor's degree from UOP . . . because it's not that we don't have degrees.

Systemically facilitating equitable access to the teaching profession is the most effective manner for providing racial equity in our educational institutions. The CBEST is very effective at identifying who is not great at test taking but does not serve as a tool to provide the most effective teachers to our students of color who need adults who understand, care, and can guide them through our racialized society.

### **Linguistic Barriers**

Four of the participants postulated that the lived and linguistic experiences of African Americans are a contributing factor to the poor CBEST passage rates. They hold that prior to formalized education the sociolinguistic imprint of African American parents and neighborhood places them at a disadvantage on a test. Participant 4 referred to it as "swag. "As long as you have Clay Street over here, all you got is minorities, and anybody that come to our school, you got to catch our swag because our swag comes from home and our neighborhoods." In other words, educators who come to schools with a sizable number of African American students need to understand and be accepting of students' linguistic experiences.

**Broken English.** Initially, Participant 3 positioned himself to assert that race is not a contributing factor as to why African Americans do so poorly on the CBEST by questioning the validity of cultural bias as a conceptual explanation of the racialized outcomes:

I might have to disagree because I don't know exactly what they mean. I don't know exactly what question they could put on the test. And if you're an African American, you would not be able to get it right. I don't understand what . . . what people mean when they say culturally biased.

Participant 3 presented this information and asked to explain the statistically significant racialized outcomes. He compared the dominance of African American athletes in team sports to the CTC data and that neither outcome was easily explained. He also suggested that African American students are afraid to ask for more help as an explanation of the racialized outcomes although he concluded that possibly it might be due to our broken English.

That's a good question. I mean, I don't know because like I said, there are a lot of people who can obviously pass it (because) there are African American teachers, you know, so I don't know why we struggle (as shown in the) statistics. Maybe it's probably the answer to the question, but it's probably, you know, like, that's just like why African Americans do better and perform better in sports than Whites are the answer to it, but it's deeper than just because they're African American. You know what I mean. Maybe it could be because your African American students are afraid sometimes to be stigmatized. They don't ask for help as much. Maybe it could be something like that, you know, I don't know, maybe it could be or something like the teacher may be the teachers don't feel you know, but maybe a lot of African Americans don't feel comfortable staying after school and getting involved in tutorial programs and things like that as an answer to it, but I'm not sure . . . So maybe, okay, as we speak broken English might be broken English at home. So maybe if you are given an exam and okay, how do you know which is right, which sentence is the correct one you use to speak in broken English, and maybe that could play some type of factor in it. And that's the best thing I could think of.

**Test design.** While Participant 1 did not speak to linguistic differences specifically, his assertions about how the test is written refer to how language comes from a distinctive cultural dynamic, verbal or written. Participant 1 postulated how the test is designed within a distinctive cultural context that is different from what he has experienced. His impression is that the questions are specific to White culture. He described the questions as riddles where he understands the lexicon of the words but not the semantic or deeper contextual meaning as they are composed on the test. He believes one can be taught how to take standardized tests successfully over a long period of time and not through short-term methods like tutoring or classes dedicated to the particular test.

I can't think like that because I don't have those experiences. I have my culture in my experience. So, I just because they're asked questions, like, it's specific to like, a White

culture. And I'm just like, I don't know, that's how I grew up . . . the most difficult to me is just the way they word the questions like, okay, when I read the question, I know what they're asking. But I feel like it's a trick question. It's a riddle, you know, and you have to be, if your brain is not programmed to understand the way they write it up, then I feel like you're never going to understand the way someone wrote it up for the test, and I feel like, not everybody thinks like that . . . If you're not taught how to take that test, then it's gonna be a lot harder for you to understand what they're asking from you . . . I just feel like public schools don't teach you what you need to know for, like tests like that . . . If you're not taught how to take standardized testing, then you're never going to be able to understand fully the question that they're asking you. That's just the way I feel.

**Home vocabulary.** Participant 2 also asserted the lack of cultural access but expressed it as a socioeconomic disadvantage, although he did agree with Participant 3 and Participant 1 that linguistic development in the home, what he called home vocabulary, makes it difficult for African American test takers to successfully take the CBEST.

What I would say comes with upbringing and we talk about language in the home . . . the scale of economics, most people of color come from the lower economic scale . . . So if we talk about cultural bias, are we saying that all institutions are equal, and then is it vocabulary in the home? Most tests can be really wordy, if the vocabulary at home to me is not at a level educationally to the highest degree, then, fundamentally, as you get older, unless you go to a really good school, then you're going to be behind the ball as far as when it comes to vocabulary interpreting the test. Do you have the critical thinking skills to read the question and answer appropriately? I think that has to be looked into because now we're saying that if everyone has an equal education then standardized tests would be equal. But we all know that public education is not equal. So then how can we have a standardized test institution?

**Kumon.** Participant 4 illustrated the socio-economic argument by humorously comparing a daycare in a lower-income area to Kumon, a well-known tutoring service that offers preschool to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade services:

I think the bottom line is that education opportunities, programs that we don't usually have in our area to take advantage of, like, most kids do. You know what I mean? . . . Let's say . . . our babysitting programs in a neighborhood would just be like, you just here eat some cereal, you know, it'll eat and we're doing our ABCs when you go to another situation, where you are paying \$1,000 a month . . . You know, they really . . . in school, you know, right, you know, so like, wow, so they do the ABCs and sound and stuff out and all that right? Lies, right as a, as a grown man, I couldn't sound up now. Cut up, like, man, we can do that. So that plays a major part, you know, I mean, but then, but then we, as you as you are growing up, it plays a major part because of the daycare type

stuff. You know what I mean? Where, you know, some people can afford to take your kids to this daycare, where they're going to teach you how to do things like Kumon Day Care . . . And then over here, over here, it's just like we are outside playing all day. And eating graham crackers and drinking juice, you know, and just being and being disciplined and directed. You know, what the Kumon you sit at the table being disciplined on how to do this math, how to read how to understand what you read. Yeah, that's the difference.

The participants are demonstrably frustrated by the verbal and written language barrier in our society that is accentuated on the CBEST. They all agree; even the one from a different perspective noted how language is a very deleterious obstacle. It would seem one who becomes college educated should have the required literacy development to teach but as has been illustrated, it does not seem to matter. As the standardized testing process illustrates, an inherent difference like sociolinguistics is deemed a deficiency and not understood as a distinctive cultural process that provides an automatic bridge to students with a similar background. An assessment that negates the cultural essence of a people who have survived many trials and travails throughout their American experience seems disingenuous. For an African American to endeavor to become an educator, one must understand the sociolinguistics of the dominant culture possibly causing one to lose connections with their cultural selves, which is integral to African American students. One participant referred to it as “swag,” in other words being able to authentically relate and express oneself within the cultural space of the African American students creating connections that enables an educator to motivate and inspire students to academically achieve while keeping their cultural identity intact. While maintaining cultural identity is essential, having an equitable opportunity to academically excel was alluded to by two of the participants, what they defined as unequal schools.



## Unequal Schools

It is a vicious cycle. There is a shortage of African American educators, and it is well documented that a vast majority of African American students attend underperforming schools. No one disagrees that increasing the number of African American teachers is integral to our nation providing a high-quality education to its citizenry, but our inability to address the socioeconomic disparities that place African American children in underperforming schools makes it difficult for African Americans to pass licensure tests like the CBEST.

**Gerrymandering.** Participant 2 eloquently articulated how school attendance areas and residential segregation begat educational segregation, which leads to funding inequities wherein district decision makers tend to provide more resources for the more successful schools and fewer resources for the least accomplished institutions.

I think that has to be looked into because now we're saying that if everyone has an equal education then standardized tests would be equal. But we all know that public education is not equal . . . And that's something that I felt again, once was obvious when we talk about gerrymandering. We talked about the public school system, how they draw up the lines for the neighborhood schools, really needs to be researched if you have done a lot of research also as well on that, and there's an unfair advantage to when it comes to public schools, neighborhood school systems, the disparity between poverty and, and the well-to-do schools. All you have to do is look at certain locations and look at test scores, and you can see the unfair advantage.

**Neighborhood.** Participant 3 concurred through his own experience how the neighborhood's reputation and focus on sports led him to focus on football and less on academic achievement because it did not seem to be a highly heralded endeavor in his locality.

Every time I talked to an African American kid, I asked him, what do you want to be when you grow up? Is either rapper, a basketball player or football players? Okay? Never ever hear African American kid say, I want to be a dentist. I want to be an accountant. I want to be an architect. Every African American kid I talked to wants to be a rapper or football player or basketball player . . . If we prioritize better, that could be (the) answer, you know, that maybe that could be something that we took it more seriously. You know that maybe we could do better, but I think a lot of young African American men. I was one of myself, I can put myself in that category. Our focus is on

sports. You know, and that's really that was my main concern was getting a letterman jacket. You know, hopefully, the letterman jacket would give me a girlfriend. Instead of like straight A's that was just never something I was really into just have a, if you told me that maybe that would get you the same results as getting a letterman jacket, I probably would have just tried a little bit harder, but it didn't you know. And then you come from a family of athletes, and you come from a neighborhood that is known for producing good athletes. That's what it expected in influence. I wouldn't be I wouldn't have been known as the guy from the neighborhood that made straight A 's in school that wouldn't have been so maybe there is something to that.

**Catholic schools.** Participant 4 posited that a key ingredient in poorer African American neighborhoods is the lack of access to educational options when compared to students in more affluent areas. He used class sizes in private schools compared to public schools as an obvious example of how students with a private school background will fare better educationally than a public-school student from his area due to basic facilities and resources that provide a better teacher-to-student ratio.

Yeah, you know, I'm saying that because everybody comes from a different background, economically. So yeah, it would be because I couldn't take a kid from a Catholic school background and put him up against a public-school situation. But now, believe me, there's no difference, but there is a difference. So smaller classes compared to 50 people in your class . . . I think the bottom line is that opportunities, you know, education opportunities, you know, programs that we don't usually (get) . . . to take advantage of, like, most kids, do you know what I mean?

**St. Mary's.** Participant 1 concurred that a private school educational experience is an advantageous opportunity and believes those students are better prepared, as indicated by the CBEST outcome data. Although, he ultimately concluded that the CBEST makes it very clear through the success of his White friends in passing the test were better prepared in Manteca than he was in Stockton.

And I feel like there's a way when you're in high school, and say you go to a private high school, like St. Mary's High School in Stockton. I feel like they, they teach you how to take these tests. But I never went, I went to a public high school. So, I felt like I fell through the cracks. And I didn't understand the way they're teaching to the test. So that's what I feel like about the CBEST. If you're not taught that way to take the test and you're not gonna, you're not gonna have the best opportunity to pass the test . . . And, like I had,

I had friends that, you know, they, they're White they went to Manteca schools their whole life, and they were able to pass any test that's put in front of them. And then when I get the same test that they have, I'm just like, this is a struggle for me like, I'm not a stupid person. No, I got my bachelor's degree in college and everything. And I'm just like, the way they word the test is not the way I think. And I feel like there's a lot of people that think like me, and that have the difficulties that I have with the test. But they're the smartest people that I know, you know, and it's I just feel like some people, they're learning, and they're taught how to do the standardized testing. And then there's some that aren't taught that way.

Our belief in an educational meritocracy is gravely misrepresented by licensure testing with its blatantly racialized outcomes. Each participant, regardless of their political persuasion or CBEST scores, all agreed that the lack of respect for African American linguistics, the continuation of deficient schools, and educator turnover as determined by maintaining historical educational inequities results in fewer African Americans being able to pass the CBEST to become teachers empowered to serve African American students who have been shown to be the lowest performing on academic achievement tests.

### **Standardized Testing Anxiety**

Rogers-Ard et al. (2013) discussed how standardized testing is designed with a culturally specific definition of proficiency that has historically and continues to systematically exclude a significant majority of African Americans from many educational and professional opportunities. The impact of what Petchauer (2014) referred to as the testing event where the dynamics of racial bias are conspicuously infused into the assessment experience were very apparent with four of the five participants who discussed the struggles and anxieties induced by standardized testing, leaving vividly scarred memories.

**Strategizing.** Participant 4 emphatically stated how he felt about assessments and then explained why. He seemed to believe “cramming” a few days before is the best way to prepare

for an assessment. Reflecting on a testing involving multiple subtests, he concluded he is just not good at strategizing to take a test:

Man, I hate tests period. I think I've probably got test anxieties. But one thing that I realized about a test for me is I can't study like 10 days out, 15 days out, I'm that guy that has to start studying like two days. So, it's all fresh in my head. You know what I mean? Okay. And so usually, when you have a test that has more than one subject matter, then it's kind of like, oh, God, you know what I mean? That's, that's when it hits you, you know what I mean? Because you think you prepare, but sometimes on the standard test you are strong in one area and weak in the other. But then what you tend to do not to study as hard as you would normally have to study for the area that you feel like you're strong in, and get in there and you'd be like, oh my god, I forgot, you know, some of the stuff that I thought I was strong at . . . So, I think that's what it is. Just test managing is bad for me, period.

**“It is a struggle.”** Participant 1 chronicled how standardized testing had always been a struggle and at times he has felt like an outsider; he had friends in school who had similar experiences.

I remember briefly, like sitting down and taking some kind of test, but I don't really remember in elementary more towards high school days. I remember the STAR tests that we had to take every year. Basically, that test was just a waste of time to me. Like, I wouldn't even try because the questions, I didn't understand a lot of the questions, honestly. But like, I'd have friends that would take it, and they would do really well on it. And then my, my other group of friends, they wouldn't do so well. And we're just like, yeah, that test is just I don't know what that test is for. You don't get graded for it doesn't go towards credit. So, you know, we didn't really try like that.

His senior high school class was the first class tasked with passing the high school exit exam.

Successfully passing the exit exam seemed to stand out as a harrowing experience.

And then I remember the very last standardized test that I had was the exit exam for seniors. Back in 2004, it was the first test called the exit exam for seniors. And we're the first class that they gave it to, and basically, it's supposed to substitute the senior project to kind of gauge your knowledge of all your high school years, to see if you grasp the curriculum that they taught you, which I thought was not fair. Because the test was given to us in a basketball gym crammed in there with pretty much the whole senior class. People were talking, you know, wasn't really structured for you to focus. So, a lot of people were cheating. A lot of people were just, you know, waiting for someone to finish their test and then fill out their test. I remember I tried, I really tried on that test, I didn't pass. So, then I was like, oh my god, I'm not gonna graduate high school now. Come to find out they gave you like three opportunities to take a test throughout the school year.

And I struggled, I struggled passing that test. Like, every time they gave it to me, I struggled with the math. The reading was kind of hard, but I was able to grasp the information. But the math and the writing sections were like the two hardest for me. I ended up eventually passing and then I still had to do my senior project. So, I never understood what the test was for. I just know we had to take it. And then after we took it that year, it was never given to any other senior class.

Participant 1 said, “I am quite capable academically except for testing and I perceive the testing process to be a culturally biased process that favors White people.”

Because I'm good with everything else. But when it comes to standardized testing, or taking a test, that's when I'm just like, man, I get that anxiety, I get that. I don't know how to say like, this kind of fear. But it's just like that anxiousness like, man, I gotta take this test again, like, I'm gonna read it. And I'll read the same question. I'll spend like, 10 minutes on it. I'm like, oh, man, I gotta go. There are 50 other questions I gotta answer. You know, it's a combination of, I know they're gonna trick me and I overthink it. So, I'm just trying to think like, I don't want to say like, you know, think like a White man.

**“Feels like a filtering process.”** Participant 2 was not challenged by standardized testing until after successfully passing the CBEST. He instead had great difficulty passing the subject matter assessment known as the CSET. While working as a teacher, he had to take the CSET five times before he passed it. He said that once the test was designed to be taken in subtests, he was able to pass:

(The) CBEST wasn't the hardest thing, I would say that the CSET (was) . . . I don't have a lot of test anxiety in general. But I do understand how a test feels like a filtering process, depending on how you phrase a question, on the vocabulary that's being used. I felt like I was highly aware of what was going on. Was it the hardest thing? I would say the MSAT, which is now the CSET, was very difficult, because I just felt like it was a long and tedious process. I had already gone through all of the coursework. So, I just felt like this was . . . to be honest. I think it is a financial thing . . . why was the financial burden on us coming out of school at the time as a college student. It was an unfair burden, and another unfair burden that every time you failed this test, that you had to ante up again and purchase this test. So, I felt like it was a huge money grab. . . . The problem that occurred for me was the MSAT with the multiple subject tests. And at the time, they required all five parts of the test to be taken at one time. And so, I felt like that was extremely unfair. And at the time, there was a large population of I believe, of minorities taking it that we're failing the test. Later down the line, they changed the rules of it and said that you could take it in increments. And then I did finally pass, and it took me about five tries to pass it. And so, at the same time, you're teaching, you're going to school, and then you're constantly having to pay for these examinations . . . And I

remember it, I felt it to be extremely unjustified. At the time, and I was a young . . . teacher at the same time. So, I want to say I was almost 20 years ago, but I can still recall till today, how I felt the bias was just that it put an unfair advantage. . . . Our people of color are people (are) trying to, to do the right thing and get through the system. But it felt like the system prevented us from doing that.

The state legislature provided an alternative to standardized testing due to racial inequity. It is quite disturbing to realize our current cognitive assessments which are utilized as the only indicator of competence do not consider racial diversity. In California, specifically in the educational profession, the commission increased the number of mandatory standardized measurements from the Basic Educational Skills Test into a subject matter test, a constitutional test, and a reading test. All the while, researchers questioned their validity or, for some, their applicability to measure who will best serve our students academically. As our society continues to over rely on standardized testing, the following vignettes and reflections of the participants clarify how nightmarish the CBEST is for people who only desire to help our young become contributing citizens.

### **CBEST Stories**

Tanner (1995) asserted that the CBEST potentially affirms teachers who are not naturally relatable to the diversifying student body. Tanner (2003) and Keleman and Koski (1998) agreed that under the auspices of increasing teacher professionalism, the test only buttresses the lack of teacher diversity. Nice (1984) observed how teacher competency testing was initiated by states with “inadequate organizational performance and culture emphasizing elite control” (p. 52). In time, it was replicated across the nation without regard for its impact on the growing diverse student population. California developed a similar tool; the CBEST was implemented in 1983. Gifford (1986) discussed how the CBEST was not designed to give test takers a means to improve their score; hence, people take it repeatedly and do not pass. Many African American

test takers who are able to educationally prevail are confronted with the embedded dominant cultural norms in licensure testing like the CBEST creating a debilitating experience (Godwin, 2018). While a minority is able to successfully negotiate the CBEST, most are not able to overcome the testing process (Hilton et al., 2020).

**“I wasn’t nervous.”** Four of the five participants deplored the testing process, and three of the five participants related their depressing memories of taking the CBEST itself. In contrast, Participant 3, who passed the CBEST and has no interest in becoming a teacher, was not troubled by the process. For him, the CBEST was in fact easier than he expected. He related how he does not consider himself a good student although he graduated from a historically Black college.

I don't exactly know what the letters stand for. But I know that's the test you take to become a teacher . . . I wasn't nervous. Okay. But I never am just knowing that I had a lot of experience with [standardized testing helped]. I don't think it really was much of a struggle for me . . . like I said, I had a pretty good night's sleep, and I had a good breakfast in me. . . . I was focused . . . Oh, I guess I'm pretty positive. Like I said I didn't have anything to regret about it. . . . I thought it would be a lot harder than what it would be because like I said, my, my issue is math. Okay, so I really thought I was gonna struggle on the math or so when the math part didn't kick my butt, like I said, my biggest apprehension was okay, how am I gonna do this? If they had Algebra on the test. But I didn't remember them doing a lot of that. (Participant 3)

**“The test just hung me up.”** In contrast to Participant 3, Participant 1, who was working as a paraeducator, shared how he became discouraged about taking the CBEST though he was able to pass a California police exam. Upon becoming a tutor for adult students in his own classroom, he became motivated to take the CBEST but was not able to pass the test.

I started looking into the CBEST, and then I was reading, like, everything I had to do. And I was like, ah, man, I don't know if I could take this test, you know, like, this is gonna be hard . . . I think that year, my 22nd, I finally passed the post-exam for police officer. It took me a while to pass that test. So, I was kind of already scared of tests going into the CBEST. So, I kind of put it in the back of my head, did the paraeducator for like, another year and a half, and then that's when . . . a tutor position . . . [with] your own classroom, you're working with adult students. So, I did that. And then that's when

I started working with an [administrator who] . . . started planting the seed . . . And he said, Man, this is the profession for you. This is what you need to do. You know, you're a tutor right now. And as a temp position, you're not getting any benefits, you're making decent money, but think about taking your CBEST . . . And I was like, this is a good profession. So, I kind of just took it (the test) . . . and then things didn't work out . . . But I was trained to be a teacher, like I was sitting in teachers' trainings . . . But the test just hung me up.

Demoralized by the testing process, he is no longer working with students in any instructional capacity because he is unable to pass the math portion of the CBEST. He ruminated how he has attempted everything imaginable including taking the test multiple times without success.

So right (I cannot pass) . . . the math, I passed the reading. So, all I need is 19 points to pass, and I'm stuck on (earning the additional) 19, I can't get past it. It's the math section that is holding me up. I've passed the writing test. And I think I need like two points to pass the reading. But I'm pretty sure if I go back and take it, I can pass the reading. It's just a math one. I just don't know what it is. I went to classes. I've done YouTube videos. I've taken the books and studied, I studied with friends. I had (a friend) help me and he's a history teacher. . . . And I've just like, I've tried everything. I went to Stanislaus and took a CBEST prep class, all the way out there for like, a good 2, 3 weeks, and I still didn't pass. And I'm just like, I don't know what else to do.

**“Man, this is crazy.”** Bartell et al. (2019) proposed a four-step process to map out a social network to analyze the people and information received in it as well as to expand it to acquire the strategies that will enable one to successfully navigate the licensure process. Participant 4, who accessed his informal network, was lucky to receive sound advice. Initially, he was told to not worry about passing but to experience it to learn what was on the test and what it was like to take it. Next, he was advised to take the three sub-tests separately allowing him to focus and prepare for each portion. Even so, he said the proctors were not very helpful and he somehow took the wrong subtest and was not aware of it until he received his results. Participant 4, a very confident person, is very reflective about his experience, but nonverbally I could see how despondent the recollection made him.



You know, not the greatest, not the greatest, you know, not the greatest. And I think when I first went in, a girlfriend of mine said, “Participant 4 just take the test.” Don't worry about if you pass it or not, you want to kind of see what the test looks like. You know, I'm saying so . . . And then she told me the next time, she says, don't go in trying to take the whole test. Take a section, take sections of the test. So, I said, Man, I took the test twice. I was like, Nah, I'm cool. cuz I've taken it at random. I took it randomly; you know what I mean? Like, and then I then, you know, I wanted to get past the math part, and end up going and taking the wrong section of the test. I'm like, Man, this is crazy. You know what I mean? So, but you know, I would have passed it. I already know I would have passed the math part. You know what I mean? But it was, it was just, it was just in the wrong section. I call and they say, yeah, you put it in the wrong section. I was like okay, I got it was like using . . . What would it be, is like, if you only took one section, I started at the top, instead of starting with that section would have started? You don't I mean, so. So, it's almost like, so it's almost like, well, if you said, hey, in the class, I'll stop on a class and say, if you guys have taken like sections of the test, if you're going to take the reading part section, here's where you want to go where you want to start . . . Right, I had to call and find out. Yeah, because they sent me the information. I was like, hold on, man, I know. I didn't just mess that up. And they said, oh, you did.

**“Something to overcome.”** Participant 5 shared how she was advised as an undergrad to begin taking the test early, but fearful she would not pass, she waited until her senior year to take the test. Although she is the daughter of an educator and the sibling of another educator, she was intimidated by the test. She even characterized the test as not just a literacy evaluation but something she had to confront and overcome. She elucidated further how the CBEST is an exclusionary tool invalidating her as an African American woman, who as a single mother had purchased a home, graduated college, and was about to realize her dream to become an educator. This successful woman was experiencing dread and feared her professional dream would not be realized.

It is – the history of the test itself because I had heard so much about it before I'd even taken it. You know, and it was never positive. It was something to overcome, you know, like, this is the last barrier before, you know, the one last hoop you gotta jump through. Before you can get in the classroom and be of service. Like this is the obstacle that you gotta get through . . . No, my university wasn't an obstacle, but I felt that the CBEST was an obstacle . . . I heard a lot about starting to take it early. Right, start, you know, taking it early, so that you don't wait until your senior year . . . I put off taking it because I did not feel that I was going to pass it. Okay, so I put it off to like, senior year. Okay, even though they were saying, take it, take it, take it professors were saying, Take it. But I

think that I was more intimidated by the test itself, um of coming up against that system that I know that it represented. Well, it wasn't just a test for me, it wasn't just the test. It was something that I had to overcome.

She shared how distressing it was to prepare for the test and how she utilized all manner of programs to pass the test. She shared how her faith in God was the ultimate turning point empowering her to overcome a system that she felt was discriminatory by deciding to take the subtest separately and rewarding herself for taking each assessment enabling her to successfully pass the CBEST.

Okay, so after, you know, all that emotional. I'm gonna know, what's the word, just all the emotional stress that I had to work through taking classes on the weekend to prepare for it, anything that was out there, you know, getting the workbook . . . I'm getting a tutor, like, I went through so many things. And I finally said, That's enough. I, it's like every other area . . . in my life, you know, I had just moved into a new home. Like, I had all these other milestones that told me I was successful. But then I had this one here that was like, got to get by this. When I finally said, this test is not bigger than me. This system is not bigger than me. I can pass this. And I remember distinctly, closing my book, my study guide, and going to sleep, I went to sleep, and I said, That's enough. I have given all I can give to this test. And for me, I allowed my faith to kick in.

Participant 5's triumph is heralded by Bartell et al. (2019), who argued that teacher preparation programs need to be theoretically grounded in two promising learning theories to empower candidates troubled by the licensure testing process: self-efficacy and socio-cultural theory. Programmatically infusing self-efficacy as a framework will allow candidates to build their confidence as a test-taker, and sociocultural theory will provide the impetus to develop a positive identity as a test taker. She passed the CBEST, in accordance with Bartell et al. (2019), whereby she developed a positive test taking identity through self-efficacy which she refers to in her retelling:

I said a prayer, went to sleep and said, you've done all you can do. (Next morning) I drove to Sacramento. Mentally I had to take charge of the day. And I remember praying all the way to Sacramento, in my car, you know, just being so demoralized by the process, having to build myself up, praying all the way. I knew that I would not take the entire test that I was going to take control back. Right. So, I deliberately said I'm going

to take each section separately. I'm not taking this whole thing together. Okay. I'm not doing that. So, I kind of empowered myself with my own strategy to say I'm going to take each section separately, because I knew I needed to build my own efficacy level, right? I take the reading, like, okay, you can do this now take the next thing that you're good at. Okay, you're good. So, I knew that I needed to do that. So that was my strategy. And going in was to take each section separately. And then um I just personally, I don't know if it's part of what you want to hear, but I had to reward myself after each milestone . . . I passed everything the first time around . . . Uh huh. I did. First time around on each section I passed. Oh, wow. And so, um, I went back again and said, so now I passed.

Although successfully passing the CBEST was a professional milestone, her anamnesis of the test-taking experience is fraught with feelings of being dehumanized and isolated. She described in arresting detail the emotional impact of what Hughey et al. (2017) referred to as everyday microaggressions. Domínguez and Embrick (2020) decried the terminology of micro because the psychological and sociological impact is far more than what the term micro describes. Participant 5 analyzed her testing experiences:

I'm not sure if I even saw any other people that look like me taking the test. In an environment that I wasn't familiar with, okay, I felt disenfranchised from the whole thing. They were a lot younger than I was the people that I did see, a lot younger, and they were a lot whiter. So even in that environment of going in, people that don't know what that feels like, I would say God, could you imagine going into a room? And nobody looked like you? Like, what if everybody looked like me and you walked into a room? How would you feel if you were a person not of color? And there were like 50 people or 100 that looked like me, and you were the only one. There's another level of pressure on you. When you walk in and just the dynamics of who's administering the test. Who's giving you your ticket. Yes, the people who has power, has the privilege, who's given the test, monitoring you while you take the test is their interaction with me while I'm taking it. All those are variables that play a role when you're taking that CBEST.

What was disturbing for Participant 5 was the vivid example of racial privilege that was displayed within the CBEST testing process, which is similar to Petchauer's (2016) assertion that the testing event can be a marginalizing experience.

The fact that all my autonomy was taken away, because now this was huge for me. I did not like from day one. The power and privilege dynamics that were inherent in who the people were that were giving the test. It was like these older White women who didn't even have degrees, did not have bachelor's degrees were the ones in power giving the

test. And I'm like, so you don't even have a degree but you're administering the test. You're telling me where to line up. . . . You're telling me where to sit. Everything, all my autonomy for me, I felt was stripped away. You were assigned a room. You were assigned a seat. Your number was on the desk and labeled and that was where you sat.

Even more disturbing was the fact probably unbeknownst to the proctors was the marginalized feelings of be assigned as an African American to sit in the back of the room (Petchauer, 2014). Our recent collective cultural history screamed at her, “Jim Crow,” as she stated, “You don’t sit in the back of anything.”

Oh, heck no. Whoa, big. And when I tell you that is the part because like, I know what's a good testing environment for me and having to be assigned to a seat towards the back of the room . . . in a corner. Oh, I remember sitting against the wall saying this whole environment is not conducive . . . I need to be by the window, by the door. I've never sat in the back of the room. No need to be I was told to go to the front of the class. I hear you. Now I was told you don't sit at the back of the bus right. You don't sit in the back of the room. You don't sit in the back of anything. So, to have my autonomy strip where I was told to sit again by someone that didn't even have my same level of education bothered me. Hence the reason why I went back to administer the test.

In response to her demoralizing testing experiences, Participant 5 became a proctor. As a proctor, she felt alienated from her proctor colleagues. She was surprised to find that the proctors were not college graduates who had taken the test but were subcontractors to a company with the state contract. They were administering professional exams as subcontractors who were not qualified to take the exams themselves. After being persistent about becoming a proctor, they hired and trained her in their homes and not in a formal setting. She was surprised at the lack of professionalism and informality surrounding a career-defining assessment.

Okay, so I took it in Sacramento . . . So I remember when I walked out, I said, I will be back to administer this test, because I didn't want anybody I don't want . . . I'm gonna tear up . . . Cuz I didn't want anybody else to feel like that, you know, going to a place that you're not familiar [with] and not seeing anyone that looks like you, and feeling like you weren't even supposed to be there. (In tears) . . . So when I walked out, I went over and I asked the people that were administering the test, What do you have to do to administer the test. And, you know, they told me that you got to pass it. First of all, I mean, this was when I walked out when I after I didn't even know if I had passed . . . And I walked out and I said, what do I need to do? . . . It impacted me so much that when I came out, I

said, Who's in charge? And who do I need to talk to? And I went in this room, and they were all having lunch. And it was all White women sitting around their tables, and they have these potlucks or like they bring food, right? So, they were all sitting in there eating and I felt like an intruder. And I'm like, how do I? I want to be able to administer this test. And they said, well, you have to pass it first before you can even talk about giving it. So now (I had passed) what do I need to do to administer (the CBEST)? They weren't hiring at that time, I continued to follow up. And then finally, I was able to get on and get hired with NCIS. And, you know, even the, our, our workshops to prepare us to administer it, I don't know, I just, I felt like a test that was so formal for the participants were very informal for those that had the privilege to administer it. Well, I went to (the proctor's) house, they were having these trainings. I thought it would just be more formal. I'm at someone's house for the CBEST. Their actual home. This is so not professional . . . I thought that was so ironic. I am at somebody's dining room, at their dining room table, telling me how to administer the test . . . And then I started administering. And then you could say, we would all bring lunch, have lunch. I would be alienated from the potlucks. I remember that. Wow. And you could stay in the afternoon. That's when the CSAT was administered. Right. So, I would stay and administer the CSAT. Right. In the afternoon.

The participants' narratives illustrate what Selvester et al. (2006) called the cost and benefits of teacher testing, such as facilitating capable test takers to enter the profession and denying candidates passionate about educating the most academically challenged in California: African American students. Statistically, a few, as demonstrated by Participant 3's narrative, had a successful CBEST experience, but Participant 5's narrative documents just how emotionally and psychologically difficult it can be for even successful African American test takers. Thus, the CBEST serves as an exclusionary mechanism that demoralizes many African Americans who desire to become educators.

### **Findings Analysis**

The emerging themes identify distinct barriers and traumatic experiences African Americans face in their attempt to become educators. Most participants expressed their dismay at the societal obstacles African Americans must overcome to enter the teaching profession. They focused on two of those barriers, linguistic differences and unequal schools. In addition, their sociological commentary and psychological reflections regarding trauma were

disheartening. All but one participant shared their personal and collective awareness of racial trauma in standardized testing anxiety and taking the CBEST. It is harrowing to think how harmful the CBEST is for African Americans who endeavor to become teachers. The findings underline an alignment between the aforementioned emerging themes and the three research questions below.

1. To what extent do African American candidates experience racialized overtones in taking the CBEST (Petchauer, 2015)?
2. What is the perceived role of oppression within the systemic or structural dynamics of the standardized testing process (Howard & Navarro, 2016)?
3. What are the counter-narratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005)?

### **It's Your Fault**

The first theme of the study, the CBEST as a barrier to African Americans entering the teaching profession, illuminates the focus on racialized overtones and structural aspects to all three research questions. When African American candidates cannot ignore microaggressions like being assigned to sit in the back, it illustrates the impact of racialized overtones. An African American attempting to join a profession learns to ignore the emotions a microaggression elicits. Still, the magnitude of the CBEST intensifies those emotions, creating a flight, fight, or freeze syndrome, disrupting the examinee's ability to focus on the exam resolutely. One who cannot maintain the appropriate mindset to ignore microaggressions will feel marginalized in the testing environment, causing one to falter. It also demonstrates how the CBEST is a racial filtering mechanism within the systemic or structural dynamics of the California teacher credentialing process. Historically, a test was designed to discriminate against African American educators, and now a test forestalls their entry into the career field.

### **African American Vernacular or Language**

The second emerging theme focuses on linguistic barriers due to the societal dismissal of African American Language as a distinct language. The thematic emergence of linguistic differences also illuminates how oppression is embedded within the CBEST. Racialized overtones, the first research focus, are embedded in perspectives on African American English as the home language that puts an African American at a disadvantage. American schools presume African Americans are dysfunctional at acquiring English and must teach them how to speak English correctly. According to the dominant narrative, African Americans' low standardized test scores are not due to their distinctive language acquisition; instead, African Americans are not academically capable. Oppression exists in the dominant society's denial of African American English as a distinct language; as such, the African American language acquisition is defined as a deficit, although its constant cultural appropriation in everyday language is easily observed. The distinct differences in language acquisition between the dominant culture and the African American community are treated as an individual choice and not a distinct cultural difference that handicaps African American examinees. The racial bias towards African American English perturbs the African American testing experience on the CBEST.

### **Our Schools Are Not the Same**

The structural and systemic racial oppression was evident in the third emerging theme, inequality in schools. Educational access is illustrated by the seemingly better educational opportunities for White children in Catholic and public schools. Catholic schools are usually tuition-based, making them inaccessible to most African American families. While access to excellent public schools is based on residential location, most African American families live near poorly staffed and generally underfunded public schools due to current socioeconomic and

historical practice. The minimal access to school choice elucidates the dynamics of systemic and structural oppression within our society. Under-resourced schools caused by the lack of residential ownership, which is used in California as a tax base for public schools, permeates limited opportunities and aspirations for a people whose subjugation was the essence of its nation's initial wealth.

### **Whose Test is It Anyway?**

The fourth theme, testing anxiety, underscores how racialized overtones and oppression encompass what seemingly is an innocuous process and transform it into an imbroglio amplifying the intensity of the testing experience resulting in anxiety. There are anecdotes of African American participants becoming disoriented or confused during the test. Also, descriptions of test questions as riddles provide a view of what African Americans experience on a standardized test. Another examinee was overcome with fear and panic. The dominant narrative concludes that these candidates do not have the required skills to become teachers and are filtered out by an evaluation on literacy and not based on any criteria related to the profession of teaching. The CBEST filters out many African American candidates, with only 67% passing compared to the 90% White candidates. In addition, since the 1940s, standardized testing has been used against African American educators. Racist structural oppression exists when current qualitative interviews verify historical precedence and statistical outcomes.

### **It Was Me Not the Test**

Standardized tests are highly regarded as colorblind processes even though their historical development in America supported racist theories about human intelligence. Due to that tradition, the dominant narrative attributes the low passage rates of African Americans on standardized tests such as the CBEST as an individual failure. However, the outcomes



demonstrate a racial outcome with a 92% passage rate of White applicants compared to 67% of African Americans. The relatively low passage rates of African American examinees illustrate how societal, educational segregation, and the historical displacement of African American educators precludes African American access to teaching.

### **Summary**

The CBEST is assumed to be a cognitive demarcation of the academic proficiency to provide instructional content even though researchers like Goldhaber (2007) questioned whether teacher assessments like the CBEST are valid. The central question of this inquiry interrogated the CBEST as an objective measure due to poor assessment outcomes for African Americans. It asked what causes prospective African American teachers to not persevere and pass it. A narrative inquiry with a counter-narrative framework was used to chronicle what makes the CBEST so difficult for African American college graduates.

It would seem odd that a particular race of accomplished adult learners would have conceptual discontinuities on a basic educational skills test as the CBEST data indicate. Even more striking is how universally accepted the CBEST racial outcomes have been to policymakers, teacher preparation programs, and students. However, the California Legislature has begun addressing the lack of teacher diversity by passing a trailer bill providing a limited alternative to taking the CBEST.

They need to understand that the CBEST is highly problematic for many pre-service candidates of color, especially African Americans. The emerging themes seem to reflect from a different vantage point the deleterious impact that assessments like the CBEST have on African American candidates. All but one participant reflected how the CBEST serves as a significant impediment to African Americans who want to become teachers. They disclosed how it seems

that the distinctive African American linguistic development is a detractor while it could possibly serve as a shared lived experience with African American students enabling them to engage and motivate them to academically achieve. In addition, they addressed the vicious cycle of deficient academic opportunity due to unequal schools, which inherently makes the CBEST process more challenging and in many cases an odious experience. Four of the five participants shared personal tribulations with standardized testing before and beyond the CBEST regardless of their educational background.

Chapter 5 uses a CRT paradigm to provide a framework for findings of the identified themes. It also discusses limitations and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this inquiry was to interrogate the impact of the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) on African Americans. The CBEST, a standardized licensure assessment, determines if a college graduate has the basic literacy skills needed to teach. The licensure testing process is popularly considered an objective process for determining whether someone is qualified to enter or become part of a profession. White applicants are not impacted by the test, with a passage rate of 91.7% (Taylor, 2021). In contrast, African Americans have the lowest passage rate at 67.9% (Taylor, 2021). The rationale of the inquiry was to ascertain why the CBEST has such a debilitating effect on African Americans who have taken the test, regardless of how well they do.

Currently, very little research exists on the CBEST. In the past, a few studies like that of Boosalis et al. (2003) used CBEST scores to identify who might fail the Reading Instruction Assessment for teachers. Keleman and Koski (1998) discussed how it reduces teacher diversity, and Pusey (1985) examined how the CBEST implementation process also negatively impacted teacher diversity. Currently, no recent research has examined the test-taking experiences of African Americans on the CBEST. This inquiry was designed to qualitatively explain why so few African Americans persevere and pass the CBEST. A narrative inquiry methodology and a counter-narrative framework guided the qualitative data gathering. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four men and one woman who had taken the CBEST. Two male and the one female respondent passed the CBEST, while the other two male candidates were unsuccessful.

This concluding chapter interprets the findings and discusses the implications of the qualitative data based on the lived African American experiences chronicled by the participants. It presents the contextual limitations and structural delimitations with possibilities for future research.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The five participants all work in a local educational agency in the central valley of California. Three of the five participants successfully passed the CBEST. The CBEST can be taken all at once or the reading, writing, and math sub-tests can be taken separately. The test can be taken repeatedly until one earns the required cut-off scores for the entire test or each sub-test. The two male participants passed the test in one sitting and the female passed each of the sub-tests separately. The two who were unable to earn high enough cut-off scores took the test repeatedly in its entirety or as subtests. One reported he had taken a sub-test at least 10 times or more and failed.

The CBEST seems to wreak emotional havoc on African Americans who seek to become educators in California. The stories of these participants clarify how the CBEST can be a psychologically scarring experience for African American educators and aspiring teachers. Their collective data identified five themes: the elimination of aspiring African American educators, linguistic differences, inequitable school experiences, the standardized testing process, and the CBEST as a significant impediment to entering the teaching profession. The findings address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do African American candidates experience racialized overtones in taking the CBEST (Petchauer, 2015)?
2. What is the perceived role of oppression within the systemic or structural dynamics of the standardized testing process (Howard & Navarro, 2016)?

3. What are the counter-narratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005)?

### **Racialized Overtones**

Research Question 1 interrogated the perceptual racialized overtones experienced by African Americans within the CBEST assessment experience. Interview questions probed racialized overtones in three of the interview questions. First, participants were asked how they felt about the CBEST testing process. Next, they were asked whether they perceived any cultural bias within the test, in other words, if the test seemed to favor a particular racial experience (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Finally, they were asked whether they felt vulnerable to the stereotypical threats as discussed by Petchauer (2012), wherein one feels threatened by possibly confirming a racial stigma such as the intellectual capacity of African Americans if they do poorly on the CBEST. Four of the five respondents largely agreed they felt racialized overtones due to cultural bias and stereotypical threats within the testing process.

**How did it feel?** Most of the participants described the CBEST as a well-designed obstruction to African Americans' access to the teaching profession. It would seem a contributing factor to the low African Americans passage rates on the CBEST are feelings of alienation.

**Cultural bias.** In response to probes about cultural bias, the participants collectively asserted that the African American vernacular seems to be a cultural barrier to doing well on the test. While it is not a simple matter of teaching test-taking skills, racial academic achievement gaps are due to economic inequality and parental educational outcomes (Hung et al., 2020).

**Stereotype threat.** Spencer et al. (2016) explained how a threat of being perceived stereotypically impacts an individual of the disenfranchised group. Their conscious awareness of

being perceived stereotypically creates a psychological conflict causing them to be unable to perform at their total capacity. Stereotype threat is not limited to marginalized individuals but seems to influence instructional paradigms and materials for schools dominated by minoritized students. Wasserberg and Rottman (2016), who elucidated how higher-order and problem-solving skills correlate to high test scores, noted that decision-makers at low-performing schools tend to adopt test-centered curricula that do not increase test scores but lower student engagement, contributing to students feeling stereotyped as part of schools with low test scores. Stereotype threat negatively impinges on marginalized people but can be the rationale for making decisions regarding their educational experiences.

Racialized overtones, verbal or non-verbal, exacerbate an emotionally excruciating experience for many African American candidates. Racialized overtones are just racism in more insipid forms like microaggressions. A microaggression may be due to a lack of knowledge and not intended to emotionally hurt someone but has the same impact. Eurocentric customs tend to be normalized while African Americans' customs are not considered. Assuming there is only one set of American social customs, and not contemplating African American social customs, creates an emotionally dysfunctional testing environment.

### **Oppression**

Adams et al. (1997) explained how oppression has evolved beyond aggrieved mistreatment in response to social change into normalized thought patterns of both the aggrieved and those who benefit. Howard and Navarro (2016) postulated how critical race theory (CRT) analyzes racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression like sexism, homophobia, classism, and nativism. Also, oppression interlocks the societal complexity of hegemonic privilege and subordination, systemically maintaining racial oppression. Kempf (2020) ascribed

levels to racism—systemic, structural, institutional, and individual—thus, deconstructing the complexity of racism. This inquiry examined how oppression in the form of racism functions structurally and systematically, normalizing the Anglo-European cultural traditions and perspectives as universally objective and fair. A standardizing process like licensure testing deemed objective but constructed from an Anglo-European perspective demonstrates the predominant statistically racialized outcomes favoring the White race.

The CBEST is a prime example. Since its inception, the CBEST has statistically favored people who identify as White, perpetuating a predominant Anglo-European teaching force even as the student body becomes even more diverse (Pusey, 1985; Tanner, 1995; Taylor, 2021). The racialized outcomes were legally challenged in the late 1980s but upheld as non-discriminatory because the importance of professional standards outweighed the racially discriminatory outcomes (Tierney, 2011). The legal decision appealed and upheld by the federal appeals courts demonstrates how racial oppression functions dynamically within the institutional structures of public education and the courts. Seriki et al. (2015) declared that not consciously considering racial discrimination as a policy or practice functions as color blindness. Racial oppression does not require an openly racist propagator but just an unconscious willingness to be institutionally efficient and not humanely effectual. When a decisionmaker or policymaker operates from the premise of being blind to color, they affirm the systemic societal inequities based on color. Color blindness insidiously sustains racialized outcomes. As such, racism functions systemically within the institutional process of licensure testing like the CBEST.

**Structural dynamics.** Caldwell and Bledsoe (2019) defined structural racism in the United States as the normalization and legitimization of various institutions that continue to privilege Anglo Europeans at the expense of people identified as the Other, such as African

Americans. Our societal institutions were predicated on racial stratification and exploitation, as Haneman (2019) asserted. It exists inherently in institutions as hierarchy parameters as dictated by historical precedence. The institutional dynamics of segregated neighborhoods force African American students to attend low-performing schools staffed with teachers from predominantly Anglo European communities who usually have stereotypical perceptions due to their segregated living experiences. The structural dynamics of popularly held beliefs that African American speech patterns contribute to academic deficiency and resegregated but inequitable schools staffed with culturally incongruent teachers to the students clearly illustrate how racism is embedded in the structural dynamics of societal institutions like public education.

**Systemic processes.** Racism has morphed in many ways into a subtle form of oppression; this inquiry sought to examine how it is perpetuated through systemic processes that are normalized as effecting rational outcomes despite their inequitable results like standardized testing in the form of the CBEST. The delegitimizing and delimiting impact of standardized testing on African Americans illustrates how effective systems are not synonymous with effective results. Our society proclaims the need for more African American teachers while ignoring the processes that limit their access. Even more ignoble is what African Americans must endure as they attempt to access societal processes. At the same time, it is pervasive and normalized throughout society. Saini and Vance (2020) delineated systemic racism as the policies and practices of exclusion without an overtly racist policy based on race or ethnicity that usually entails a normalized social inequity that does not necessitate individual intent and has a more significant effect. The state-by-state adoption of licensure testing for teachers during the 1980s while being academically forewarned it would maintain the lack of teacher diversity is an overarching example of systemic racism related to this study (Brown, 2005).



California adopted the CBEST with an alternative pathway at the state level for aspiring African American teachers who would not be able to pass the CBEST due to historical precedents. Over time, discontinuing the alternative pathway demonstrated the systemic imperative of standardizing licensure testing at the expense of teacher diversity. The systemic expansion of standardized licensure testing beyond the CBEST and the inclusion of other standardized tests like the SAT or ACT as alternative pathways is a definitive example of racial oppression within processes assumed to be blind to color. Rationalized blindness to color systematically maintains the predominance of White teachers utilizing standardized testing to suppress African American access to the profession; thus, racial oppression has evolved from formalized explicit practice to implicit policy. Oppression is at its apex when a process like the CBEST with a predacious history and racialized outcomes are normalized as an essential part of a benign process like teacher credentialing. The CBEST institutionalizing mechanism affirms hierarchical structure and maintains a hegemonic system based on a social construct of dominant White outcomes and poor African American results (Bell, 2016).

### **Counter-Narrative Responses**

The third research question problematizes the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process through the participants' counter-narratives distinctive to their African American experience in standardized testing like the CBEST. Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) counter storytelling empowers the voice of those marginalized whose perspective on their experiences has been historically ignored or invalidated. Counter storytelling as a form of narrative has a universal appeal that disassembles the dominant cultural reflex to dehumanize human experiences in conflict with its interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Sato (2013) explicated the potency of counter narratives chronicling marginalized struggles in a racist

society, which posits itself as color blind. It empowers the minoritized narrators like African American examinees to validate their experiences and hopefully realize how race complicates their life journey and determine how to operate within its confines (Henning et al., 2018; King et al., 2020). This study contributes counternarratives distinctive to the African American experience in taking a standardized test like the CBEST in response to the dominant perspective of standardized testing as an objective process (Gillborn, 2005).

**Dominant narrative.** The dominant narrative held by state legislatures is that licensure testing is the most effective way to maintain teacher quality. Therefore, a basic literacy test for teaching like the CBEST is an effective filter that raises the quality of those who seek to enter teaching, disqualifying a significant percentage of African Americans who are otherwise possibly qualified to teach. Although the CBEST has limited empirical evidence of its predictive validity, it is normalized as an analytical tool for qualifying people who aspire to teach with a 90% passage rate of White candidates compared to a 60% passage rate of African Americans. Goldhaber and Hansen (2010) stated, “Little empirical evidence available about the predictive validity of teachers’ performance on these tests as an indicator of classroom effectiveness” (p. 2). In their meta-analysis, Klassen and Kim (2019) clarified that all current forms of teacher selection, academic and non-academic, provide significant but tiny effect sizes. At the same time, many scholars have documented how standardized testing prevents African American examinees from entering the career field (Gitomer et al., 2011; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Petchauer & Baker-Doyle, 2019).

**Counter narrative response.** In contrast with the dominant narrative, participants elucidated through counternarrative recollections and reflections how the test seems designed to keep African Americans out of the profession. It would seem an assessment deemed to fortify

the teaching profession eliminates prospective African American educators. The dominant narrative normalizes the low number of successful African American examinees on the CBEST as a fair outcome, while the lack of teacher diversity demonstrates the irrationality. As expressed by most of the interviewed examinees, the African American counter-narrative is that the CBEST is unreasonable, as it creates racially charged conditions that lead to poor outcomes related to race.

### **Discussion**

The qualitative data support the existing literature regarding the negative impact of licensure testing on diversifying the teaching profession related to African American candidates (Behizadeh & Neely, 2018; Brown, 2005; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Carter-Andrews et al. (2019) denoted how licensure exams developed in the South eliminated African Americans from teaching. Researchers chronicled the adverse effects of teacher licensure testing on African American examinees (Madkins, 2011; Petchauer, 2014; Sleeter, 2016). Also, Carver-Thomas (2017) of the Learning Policy Institute confirmed how the disparities in failure rates have been vast. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4, many examinees do not persist due to the following reasons”

- Testing as barrier to African American preservice candidates
- The invalidation of African American linguistics
- The inequitable access to educational alternatives
- Emotional toll of the testing process

The CBEST disproportionately eliminates African American teachers, and this study chronicles contributing factors. CBEST outcome data amplify their perspectives. The current form of licensure testing prevents African American educators from entering the career field where they are sorely needed.

## **Implications**

This inquiry provides agency to the African American voice to provide a counter-narrative to the popularly held perception that African American teachers are just not intelligent enough to become teachers. The inquiry authenticates practical implications for the California legislature, policymakers, local educational agency hiring officials, teacher preparation programs, and African American examinees. These implications clarify how licensure testing like the CBEST heightens the teacher shortage of African American teachers. Integral to lessening the credentialed teacher shortage and the dearth of African American educators is redesigning how California intellectually qualifies prospective educators.

### **Legislature**

As California faces an African American teacher shortage intensified by the pandemic, it is imperative to authorize new legislation to change the current law that requires a prospective teacher to meet the basic skills requirement. Currently, one applying for a credential, certificate, or permit to teach in California must demonstrate basic skills proficiency. Proficiency recently meant passing the CBEST or an equivalent standardized test. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2018), at least 40% of those who intend to teach are impeded and, in many cases, disabled by testing. The stated purpose of the current law was to increase teacher effectiveness; instead it perpetuated the predominant majority of White teachers with very little training, attempting to teach a growing multi-ethnic student body. As the ethnic achievement gap widens, the state of California's K-12 student population continues to become predominately other than White and will continue (Bryant et al., 2017; Petek, 2020). The many White teachers, it seems, do not have the cultural capacity to teach the rapidly diversifying student body successfully.

State lawmakers must reform statutes regarding licensure testing, especially the CBEST, due to the specific racial outcomes it currently produces. Failing to reform exclusionary legislation perpetuates racial inequities contributing to the underutilization of the state's intellectual capacity to address the racialized student outcomes and low-performing schools. To lessen the overall shortage of credentialed teachers, Assembly Bill 130 became law. The law expanded the options for meeting the basic skills requirement beyond just standardized testing. It allows coursework or a combination of coursework and examinations to meet the basic skills requirement. It would have been more impactful to allow a bachelor's degree to meet the basic skills requirement, but AB 130 is a step towards teacher diversity. If utilized to its fullest extent by the CTC, it could be a fantastic opportunity for African Americans aspiring to teach.

### **Policymakers**

Larsen et al. (2020) created a stringency index asserting teacher testing does not impact teacher diversity because it does not decrease the “fractions” of groups like African American teachers. In contrast, CBEST outcomes for prospective African American educators illustrate how teacher testing prevents access to a profession in dire need of African American teachers for all students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Rector-Aranda (2016) observed African Americans are stigmatized when “color-blind” policies are based on standards to resolve historical inequities. David Archer (2021) described objective standards as “whiteness as the default, “or the Eurocentric perspective as the logical universal criterion (p. 14).

Larsen et al.'s (2020) research offers an impetus for CTC to assume the current licensing model is effective even if it may contribute to continually undeserving students who need African American teachers. If the CTC decides to narrowly interpret the new law by restricting what coursework can be used in lieu of taking the CBEST, then the lack of teacher diversity will

be maintained. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) should implement the new criteria involving coursework or a combination of coursework and exams assessment with expediency. Including coursework as a criterion for meeting the basic skills requirement lessens the traumatic impact of standardized testing used historically to displace and now prevent African Americans from becoming educators. The influential role of the CBEST as the gatekeeper for accessing the teaching profession must diminish if California is to meet the academic challenges created by the perpetuation of training and hiring culturally isolated and ill-trained cadres of White teachers.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

The teacher preparation programs should align their enrollment policies with the new law and emphasize using the transcripts to meet the basic skills requirement. They will create a more significant opportunity to enroll desperately needed African American preservice candidates by emphasizing the transcripts. Rejecting the dominant view of the efficiency of standardized measures could alleviate the racially abhorrent outcomes that perpetuate a stereotypical assumption that African American college graduates are not as intellectually capable as White applicants. The qualitative data in this inquiry challenge this assumption as the participants reported passing other standardized tests and earning graduate degrees. Our society desperately needs teacher preparation programs to design, recruit, and support African American examinees. A critical step in this process is hiring African American faculty capable of recruiting and supporting African American candidates. Actively recruiting African American students and faculty provides teacher preparation programs with two opportunities to lean into social justice. Diversifying teacher preparation staff and utilizing them to create a process to diversify their

enrollment will be the impetus to increasing the number of African American teachers required to support our ever increasingly diverse student body.

### **Local Educational Agency Hiring Officials**

In 2018, the California Legislative Analyst's Office published a report titled *Narrowing California's K-12 Student Achievement Gaps* (Petek, 2020). The report statistically highlights African American students with the lowest graduation rates and test scores but the highest chronic absenteeism rate and suspended rates in California. Essential to addressing the needs of California's African American student population is increasing the number of African American teachers. Research has shown that an increase in African American teachers with similar backgrounds to their students would substantially change the disturbing African American student outcomes (Gershenson et al., 2018; Rasheed et al., 2020; Redding, 2019). Teachers who reflect the student body tend to have higher expectations and are more likely to build relationships that motivate their students due to their shared cultural experiences (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Gershenson, 2018). Adoption of the AB 130 criterion lessens the impact of the CBEST and provides a pathway toward diversifying a local educational agency instructional staff. Utilizing this inquiry's qualitative data should clarify what their African American candidates may face in overcoming the CBEST and encourage local educational agencies to use coursework criteria to recruit African American instructional interns. Local education agencies should create internship programs to identify, recruit, and support high school and college graduates from the African American community to become teachers in partnership with universities and colleges.

### **African American Examinees**

Most importantly, this study empowers African American candidates to understand that the CBEST does not necessarily test their literacy skills but their ability to perform test skills from the dominant perspective. A culturally assimilated person needs to prepare for test content and develop test skills, but one whose experiences are not as aligned to the dominant culture will need to consider, as Participant 5 suggested, their mindset towards standardized test-taking. Hopefully, by realizing that the test does not accurately measure applicants from a marginalized American cultural orientation, one will realize the test does not reveal a deficiency but necessitates developing the skills required to take the CBEST and not become overwhelmed by the racialized environment and disorientating test questions.

If key constituents of all groups mentioned above within their respective educational institutions seriously consider the narrative recollections and reflection contained within this study, hopefully they will consciously consider what racial oppression does within our public institutions. The following section offers suggestions for future research to examine how public institutions like public education can redesign standardized processes like the CBEST so that they qualify teachers without racialized outcomes.

### **Discussion on Future Directions of Research/Field**

A possible extension of this study is increasing the current sample size, thus providing a more comprehensive interpretation of the African American lived experiences in taking the CBEST. A more expanded direction is to construct similar studies related to the broader area of standardized testing and, more specifically, licensure testing. The African American perspective has commonality but is not monolithic and should be expanded to validate and confront popularly accepted stereotypical explanations of how or why racialized outcomes exist. Further



analysis would also explain how our institutions and systems facilitate racial oppression in conflict with policy and statutes designed to alleviate its discriminatory presence in professional hiring practices.

### **Expanding the Sample Size**

While the study clarifies the causal factors to the adverse racial outcomes of the CBEST, a larger sample size would provide greater impetus to look beyond the simplified dominant narrative and realize how racial oppression operates as revealed by the counternarrative. The broader challenge in this field of research is problematizing the effects of racially residential segregation. Limited or no lived experiences with other racial groups influence one to accept desultory explanations for racialized outcomes that tend to hold the members of the victimized group accountable for being oppressed and not the systems or institutions in maintaining the oppressive effects. A more significant collection of African American narratives would provide a more in-depth grasp of how racial oppression coalesces within institutions and systems, causing individuals committed to racial equity to contribute to its maintenance inadvertently.

### **Licensure Testing**

Inexorably, some form of licensure testing is required to become licensed or certified in many professions. The counternarratives of this study indicate a more significant problem for African Americans seeking to enter a profession. As African Americans engage in the challenging certification process, they are faced with an added layer of adversity. Their adversity, racial oppression in the form of microaggressions, stereotype threat, and cultural bias, must be problematized and chronicled to make all constituents consciously aware of what is causing the lack of racial diversity in a given profession.

## **Standardized Testing**

Standardized testing as it is utilized today seems irredeemably an exclusionary device. Intellectual testing was initially developed to identify strategies to help children with challenges. Testing in America redesigned racially classified human intelligence. Intelligence was assumed to correlate with a phenotype continuum of darker skin with lower intelligence and lighter skin with higher intelligence. Those racist correlations are still part of our collective consciousness, as shown by the racialized outcomes of standardized testing. K-12 state assessments continually reveal the racial achievement gap, and we operate from the premise of racial deficiency due to social conditions. The counternarrative of qualitative research must challenge test designers in developing tools that effectually eliminate causal factors that racially alienate.

## **Conclusions**

The dominant view of racism is a stereotypical image of a neo-Nazi or a Ku Klux Klan member committing crimes in the name of hatred. Hate crimes are the extremist forms of racism, but racial oppression embedded in our societal structures and processes is far more insidious. Historically, the study revealed the historical precedence of standardized testing as a tool of discrimination resulting in unequal pay and displacing African American educators. Currently, it prevents African American access to a teaching profession bereft with personnel shortages especially in the African American community where it has been shown by African American student outcomes. It was explained how the test filters out and hinders African American progression into the career field. Due to this nation's historical tendency to design policy and processes based on racial preference, the challenge is now to consciously design policy or processes that are not racially coercive and use qualitative research to ensure it is not racially pernicious.

CBEST purported to increase the academic rigor of preservice candidates has continuously produced racialized outcomes that favored the dominant group. In response this qualitative inquiry examined how the CBEST, an institutional evaluation within California's teacher credentialing process, undermines African Americans who desire to become teachers. The study's findings demonstrated the systemically embedded racialized overtones in the CBEST. These racialized overtones were shown to demoralize African American examinees. The oppressive effects of the CBEST have been quantitatively demonstrated since its inception as in the 1980s when fewer than 50% of African Americans were passing, and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century over 60% pass. The expansion in the African American passage rate is due in large part to the resilience and resistance of African American examinees which are illuminated in the form of counter-narratives interrogating the dominant perspective of the CBEST as an objective measure of educator literacy.

Institutionally supporting our diversifying citizenry requires more than evaluative norms but multiple supportive processes assessing our entire diversified intellectual capital. Consciously designing and iterating for our entire citizenry will ensure our societal longevity. Licensure processes equitably designed and consistently evaluated to maintain equity will produce a more diverse and capable professional class to educate our rapidly diversifying generations of the future. Licensure testing aligned to professional standards developed based on the profession in support of a diverse society that can be learned through instruction and practical experience will be invaluable to our continuously diversifying citizenry.

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APPENDIX A: CRITICAL RACE THEORY TENET ALIGNMENT WITH INTERVIEW  
QUESTIONS

Interview Questions	CRT Framework
1. What are your experiences with standardized tests? (Probe: What standardized tests have you taken?) What words come to mind when you hear the word “CBEST?”	Valuing experiential knowledge
What words describe how you felt while actually taking CBEST? (Can include before, during, and after the test; same instructions as Question 2 above.)	
How was your experience with CBEST similar to and/or different from other standardized tests you have taken?	
2. Before you took CBEST, how did you predict your performance would be? (i.e., How did you think you would do?) (Probes: on the whole thing? On individual tests?) What accounts for your prediction on CBEST? (Probes: classes, other tests, what others have said?)	Counter Story
What do you think is most difficult about CBEST? (Probes: time limits, content, format?)	
3. A lot of people say that standardized tests are culturally biased or that they favor some groups over others. Why do you agree or disagree with this?	Centrality of racism
4. Some research shows that minority students perform lower on standardized tests compared to majority or white students. What do you think are some reasons for this performance? (Probes: Are stereotype threat and vulnerability factors?)	Commitment to social justice
Are you aware that historically testing was used to pay African American teachers less and eliminate them after the Brown Decision and what impact does that have on African Americans now?	
5. Some would argue African Americans just need to have the right mindset and the grit to pass the test, do you agree why or why not?	Challenging the dominant perspective

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

## Consent to be a research participant

The purpose of this study is to examine how African Americans experience standardized testing especially with the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST). A counter-narrative inquiry will be employed to describe the lived experiences of African American teachers to interrogate the test's impact on the number of African American teachers in California.

You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30-60 minutes at a time and place convenient to you. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed on Zoom with your permission. If you have any questions or concerns at any stage of the study, you may ask the researcher, or the faculty sponsor listed below:

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Faculty Member</b>
Willie Thomas	Anne Zeman
University of the Pacific	University of the Pacific
Benerd College of Education	Benerd School of Education
Leadership	Leadership
Stockton, CA 95211	Stockton, CA 95211
Ph. (916) 271-2545	Ph. (209) 946-2683
w_thomas3@u.pacific.edu	<a href="mailto:azeman@pacific.edu">azeman@pacific.edu</a>

There are minimal risks associated with this study such as possible discomfort with an interview or an interview question. To address these minimal risks, the researcher has a commitment to ensure no harm comes to you because of participating in the study. He will work with you to limit the duration of the interview. In addition, you are encouraged to share any discomfort or concerns with him, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All records will be handled confidentially. Only Willie Thomas and/or the faculty member, Dr. Anne Zeman, will have access to Zoom recordings, transcriptions, and field notes. After the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. Pseudonyms will be given to each study participant and used on all study documents and reports.

I fully understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. However, the information that I provide may help to provide information to enhance educational success for future African American educators. I have talked with Willie Thomas about this inquiry and my questions have been answered. If I have further questions, I may call him at (916) 271-2545.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. If I have questions or concerns about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. I can stop at any time. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the faculty member, Dr. Anne Zeman, or the Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. Participation in this research is voluntary. I am free to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a teacher. I have reviewed this consent form and understand and agree to its content.

Participant name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

This protocol was designed to understand students' experiences with their licensure exam – both thinking about it and the “test event” of taking the exam. The protocol also attends to beliefs about their capabilities on the exam and beliefs about cultural bias.

1. What are your experiences with standardized tests? (Probe: What standardized tests have you taken?) What words come to mind when you hear the word “CBEST?”
2. Before you took the CBEST, how did you predict your performance would be? (i.e., how did you think you would do?) (Probes: On the whole thing? On individual tests?) What accounts for your prediction on the CBEST? (Probes: classes, other tests, what others have said?)
3. What words describe how you felt while actually taking the CBEST? (Can include before, during, and after the test; same instructions as Question 2 above.)
4. How was your experience with the CBEST similar to and/or different from other standardized tests you have taken?
5. What do you think is most difficult about the CBEST? (Probes: time limits, content, format?)
6. A lot of people say that standardized tests are culturally biased or that they favor some groups over others. Why do you agree or disagree with this?
7. Some research shows that minority students perform lower on standardized tests compared to majority or white students. What do you think are some reasons for this performance? (Probes: Are stereotype threat and vulnerability factors?)