

# **Are American born Blacks in Cambridge prepared for post-secondary success?**



CPAR Research Study : Study 6

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# Critical Participatory Action Research: Cambridge

Between June 2018 and May 2019, 24 educators from the Cambridge Public Schools engaged in a set of CPAR studies, each of which examined root causes of inequality in the district. Educators were chosen through an extensive recruitment & application process, and included:

- Researchers from 8 elementary schools, all 5 Upper Schools, and CRLS;
- School-day and Out-of-School-Time educators;
- Over 50% educators of color.

These educators were supported by two members of the Building Equity Bridges Grant Working Team, as well as two researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Additional support was provided by two Researchers who joined the Support Team (shared leadership team).



# Critical Participatory Action Research

CPAR projects are “rooted in the belief that those most impacted by research should take the lead in framing the questions, design, methods, analysis and determining what products and actions might be most useful in effecting change.”

– Torre, 2009, p.1



# History of Cambridge Rindge & Latin

Cambridge has a 350 year history of public school education.

First, connected to Harvard College to prepare male students for higher education.

Over time educational philosophies, funding and community commitment to public education change and evolve.

CRLS was founded when the Rindge Technical School was merged with Cambridge Latin high school in 1977.

Rindge Tech was a national model of a successful technical high school.

A modern, comprehensive high school that includes a state-of-the-art vocational and technical arts program,

Cambridge Rindge and Latin School is a reflection of the progress of the past three centuries.

*Cambridge Public Schools*



# Research Questions

In our study, we wanted to explore the challenges and barriers to success after highschool for American born Blacks that graduate from CRLS.

We asked these questions:

How do you feel CRLS defines success for its graduates?

When at CRLS, what opportunities did you know you could pursue after high school?

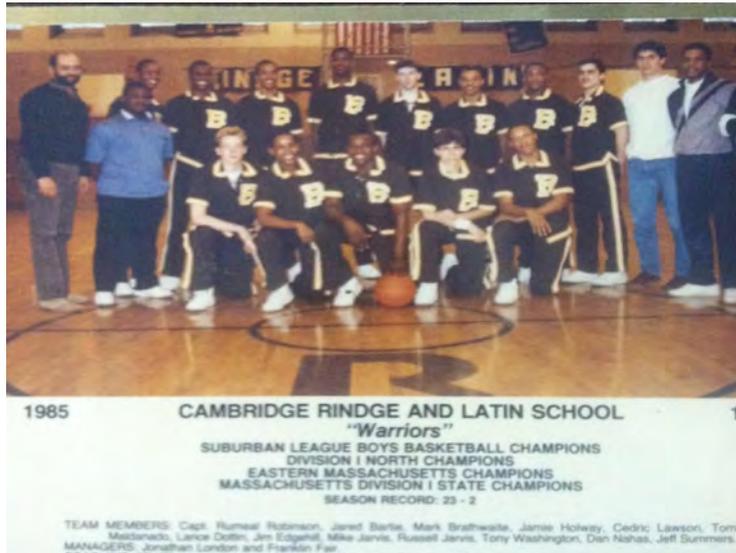
What support did CRLS provide towards reaching your goals after high school?

What support do you wish you had from the school that you did not receive?



# Research Methods

We designed a study that collected the data best suited to answer our questions. Over the course of our study, we conducted one on one interviews and surveys with a wide range of CRLS alumni, parents and current students.



# Research Participants

To answer these questions, we worked to recruit participants who represented our target population. Ultimately, our research included interviews with:

- *41 Alumni, Parents (or both) that identified as American born Black or African-American*
- *1 Biracial/African-American and white*

In order to include current data, we also conducted an interactive survey with:

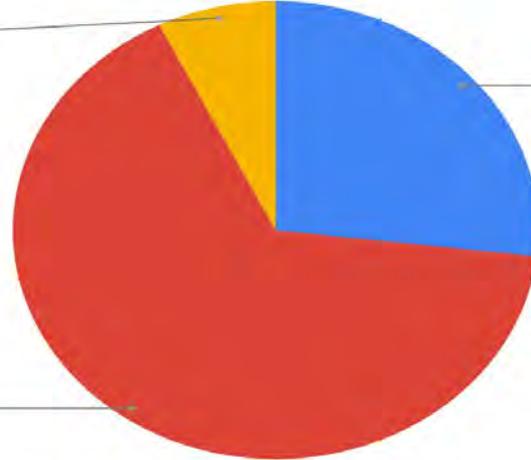
*14 current CRLS seniors that identified as American born Black or African-American*

Participant Type

**Parent**  
7.3%

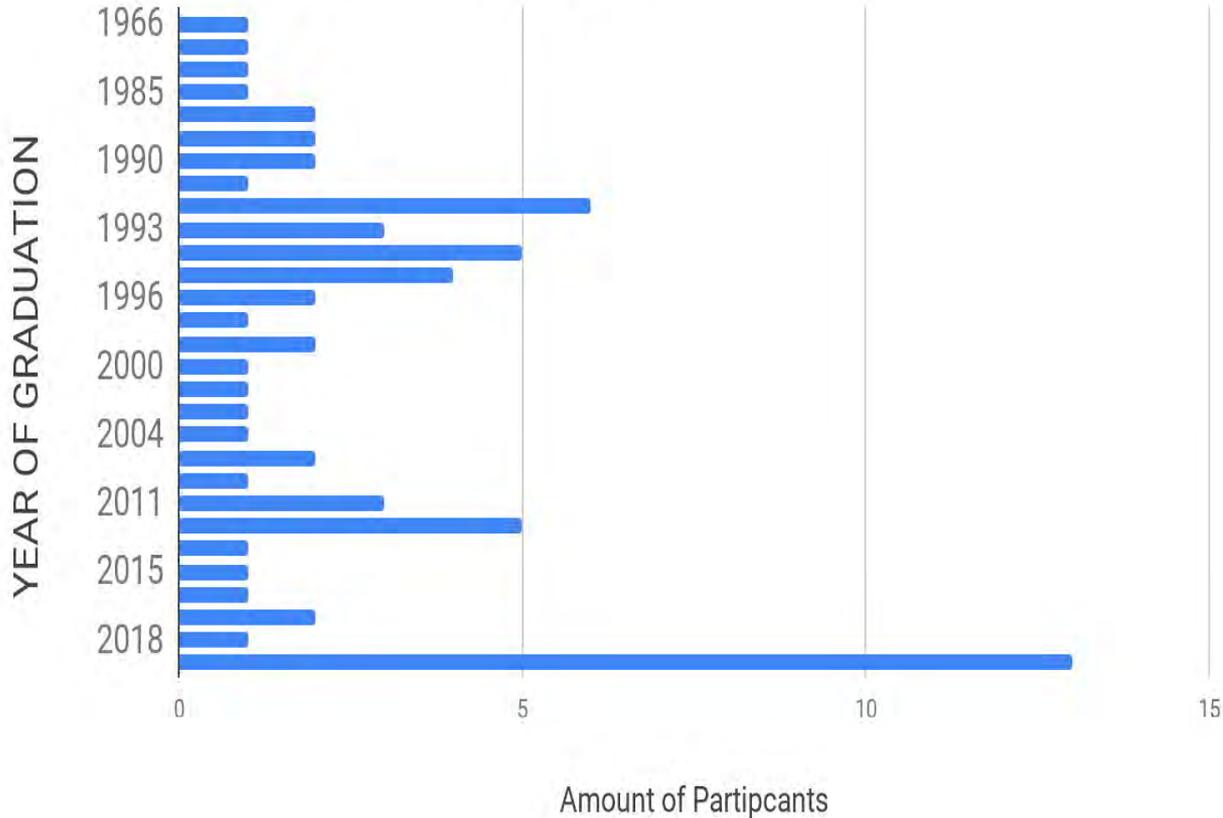
**Both**  
26.8%

**Alumni**  
65.9%



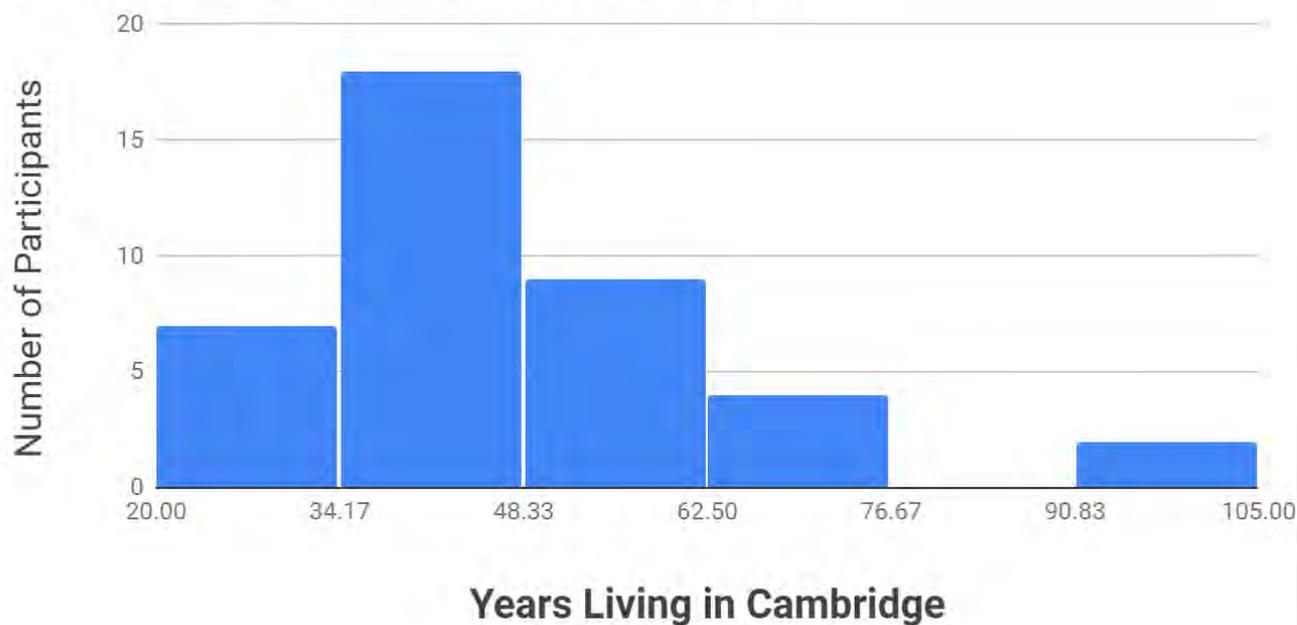
# Participant Demographics

When did you or your child(ren) graduate ?



# Participant Demographics

How long has your family lived in Cambridge?



# Participant Demographics: Careers

Insurance Agent , Social Services,  
Education, Sales, Consultant,  
Professor, Counselor, Law Enforcement  
Arts and Entertainment, Barber and  
Cosmetology, Business Owner, Retired,  
Student, Non-Profit, Media Production,  
Business Executive, Criminal Justice,  
Technology, Facility Manager, HVAC  
Technician, Finance, Community  
Organizer, Health and Wellness, Higher  
Education, Healthcare, Nurse, Public  
Health, Elected Official, Real Estate



# Overview of Findings

We want to thank the participants that shared their experiences and hopes for success among American born Blacks in Cambridge.

The majority of participants cited attending College as the definition of success after CRLS. Very few alternative opportunities were identified as pathways graduates could pursue. In order for post-secondary success to be achieved, encouragement, transparency around academic skills and resources must be used to build high quality college and career readiness programs.

Recommendations came directly from participants and include: (1) the continuation of services outside of and beyond the high school day and the 12th grade, (2) College and Career Exploratory, (3) Mentors, (4) Mental Health Counseling and (6) Internships.

# Q1: How does CRLS define success?

42% Cited College  
Acceptance/Enrollment



31% Cited  
Graduating  
High School

18% Cited  
None/No Clear  
Definition



8% Cited Being  
prepared to work/  
finding employment

## How is success defined by CRLS?

**Gain Employment**

8.1%

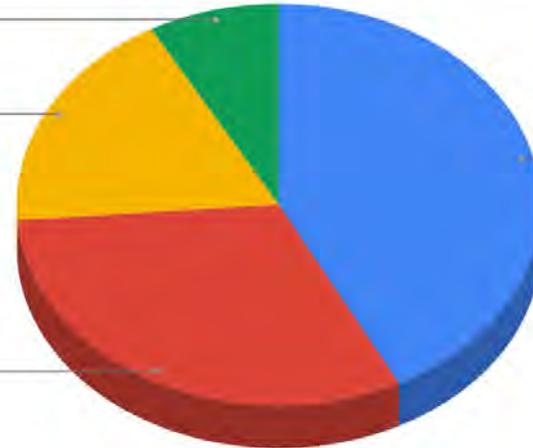
**None / No clear**

18.2%

**Graduating High**

31.3%

**College Acceptance /**  
42.4%



# Q1: How did CRLS define success after graduation?

If you took the AP classes there was a big push to go to college, but the CP classes didn't expect high performance ...they did not explain the process to get into college- it was not an expectation.

I do think it was the kids that were college bound were celebrated. I was going off to be a teacher so I was definitely praised for that.

When you don't come from a background that pushes education you need the school to provide the motivation.

I don't remember my teachers expressing any idea of success in the future. I never had anyone talk to me about possible jobs or careers.

They had no definition of success. I was on my own, just getting out was the goal and seen as the finish line.

I don't know, guess it was getting into college. None of the teachers asked what was next, or what I wanted to do. Graduating seemed like success.

Rindge only celebrates the college degree pathway.

If you didn't go to a "well-known" college, you were considered a failure.

## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES COULD YOU PURSUE AFTER CRLS?

Participants responded:



1 COLLEGE (54%)



2 EMPLOYMENT (23%)



3 TRADE SCHOOL (10%)



4 NONE (7%)



5 OTHER (4%)

Cap Year, Internship.



6 MILITARY (2%)

## Q2: When at CRLS, what opportunities did you know you could pursue after high school?

What opportunities did you know you could pursue after high school?

Other

4.0%

Military

2.0%

None

7.0%

Trade School

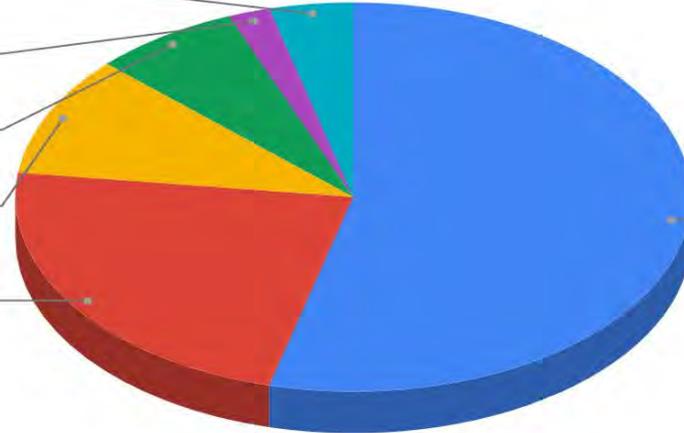
10.0%

Work

23.0%

College

54.0%



## Quotes: When at CRLS, what opportunities did you know you could pursue after high school?

As a parent, I attended one college night and one financial aid night but they didn't provide any other information about alternatives to a four year college, working, trades, GAP year, internship programs, etc.

I didn't have anyone at the high school that held me accountable to make sure applied.

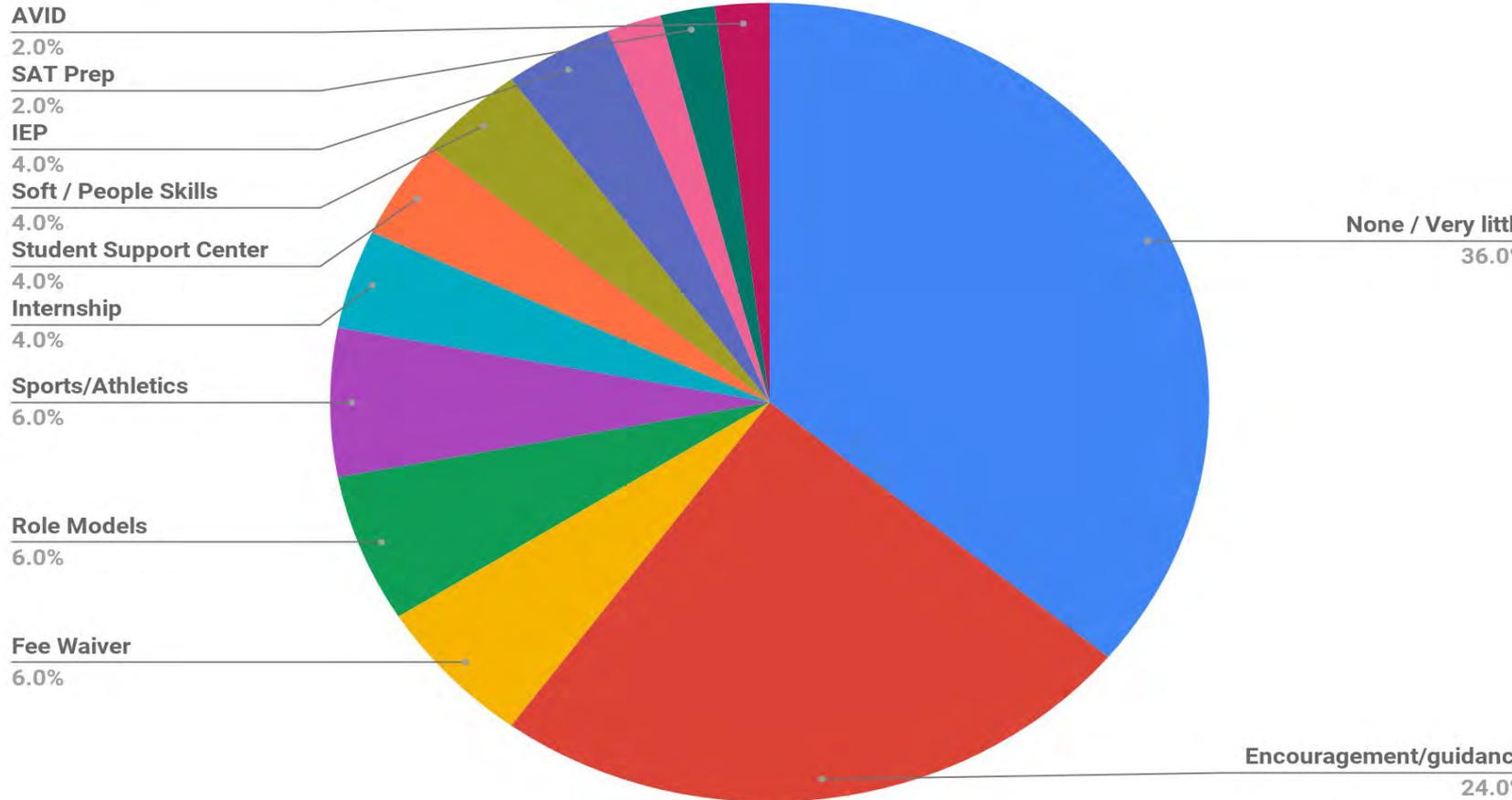
I knew I had to work after high school because I needed to be financially stable. My older brother went to Northeastern University the year before and he dropped out, but bills were still coming and stressing him out.

As a transfer from NCC, I had an opportunity to join a career center and take advantage of a career prep program

My son's GPA was about 3.5 and the Guidance Counselor was recommending schools that were below his profile, they were setting the standard so low.

None, I wasn't pushed to go to college, my teachers just wanted me out.

### Q3: What support did you receive toward reaching post-secondary goals?



## Quotes: What support did you receive toward reaching your post-secondary goals?

I didn't meet with my CRLS guidance counselor very often, I had Upward Bound to help with my college prep and planning.

CRLS teachers actually discouraged me from applying to certain colleges, but at Upward Bound they encouraged us.

They loved me in school, but no one helped me figure out my next move

My guidance counselor, a Black woman, told me I am going to Spelman.

My coaches supported me, in terms of athletic opportunities.

My guidance counselor was always looking for resources for me.

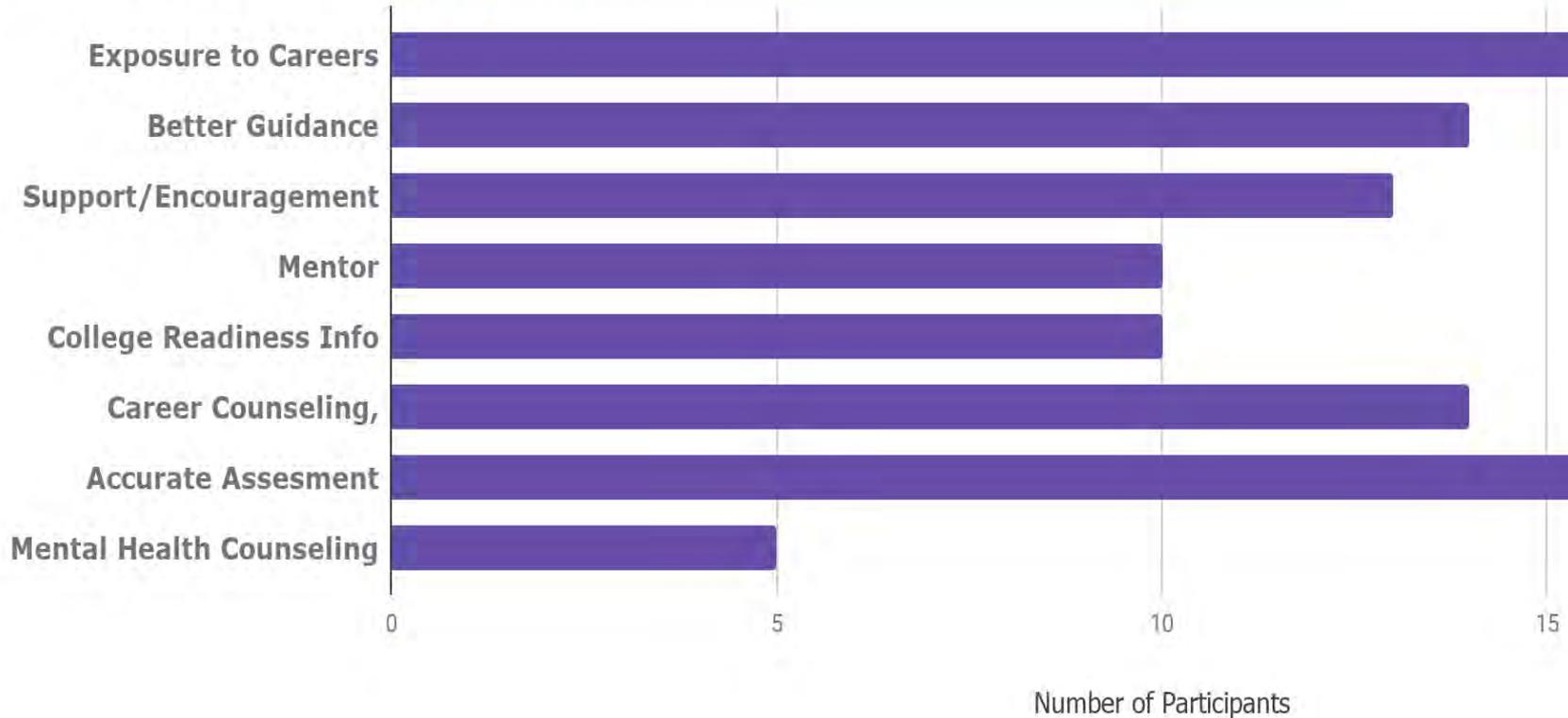
I'd say from my junior year, I knew I was going to get a football scholarship to college... I was thinking about where I was going to play football, not what was the best fit.

(My sons) they were falsely propped up but were not academically prepared.

Guidance counselor definitely kept track of deadlines for my son.

# Q4: Support you wished you had received

## Support you wished you had received



# What Support do you wish you had received? Quotes

...Navigating the college experience as a black student, coming from where I felt accepted to a school with less than 1% African- American students. I would have benefited from some sort of mentoring group for black men in college.

**More exposure to realistic options, not pie in the sky “you can be anything you want to be.” I needed actual preparation for the real world.**

After exploratory there were no entry points or ways to get involved with technical education.

Having a more accurate assessment of my academic strengths and weaknesses.

Transparency around my skills and my gaps in learning.

Earlier and more specific conversations around college, what it means...and their reasons for going. A lot of schools in the south have Homecoming tradition that connects the alumni of the school with the current students and celebrates the culture of college. I think at CRLS there is no expectation for the kids of color to go to college.

When I got to college [that first year], I didn't feel prepared... So many of my friends suffered from depression.

Help determining whether college was necessary, career counseling to figure out the best post-secondary choice.

Somebody to walk me through the admissions process, to help get a sense of what I wanted to study. I was 16 when I graduated and was not really ready for college, and had no real support.

# Additional Findings: Community members and organizations credited for having a positive impact

## Celebrated Community Members

Mr. Kimbrough  
Ms. Pierce  
Ms. Hunter  
Dean Filo  
(Philomena)  
Ms. Lozado  
Ms. Brisk  
Jamal Prince  
Lance Dottin  
Donald Burroughs

## Celebrated Organizations

Upward Bound, Peer Mediation, Workforce, Basketball, Talent Search, Harvard Mentor Program, ERI, Theater, Black Student Union, Cambridge Community Center, Hip Hop Transformation, Swim Team, Pilot Plays, Onesimus Project, HBCU Tour, Camp Wing, Henry Buckner School, Community Art Center, STARS, Youth Centers

86% of the respondents cited the importance of at least one of the following:

- Black Administrators
- Great relationship with my counselor
- People of color I could talk to
- Black female role models
- Multiple diverse individuals
- High expectations

# Interview Participant Recommendations for Action:

The City of Cambridge has so many resources and should be doing more than giving a kid a place to play basketball. The Youth Centers are the perfect place to do some post-secondary planning and help young people figure out who they are and what they want.

**Alternatives to college or one year post secondary follow up- resources help with the transition to college**

**A mentor in addition to a guidance counselor, to tell me my responsibilities as a student.**

I wish he would have encouraged me to take the AP class, by making sure I had the support and tutoring.

**A handbook for seniors, with a timeline of information**

More parent outreach and workshops that students and parents can go to together.

More proactive with info and opportunities

**Reevaluate the resources and support provided for all kids**

**We need to make every child feel important, heard, supported and celebrated.**

# SURVEY EXCERPTS: CURRENT CRLS AMERICAN BORN BLACK SENIORS (2019)

<b>How has CRLS defined success for its graduates?</b>	<b>How prepared do you feel to succeed after graduation</b>	<b>How will you define success for yourself after high school?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• College acceptance</li><li>• Having good grades</li><li>• Success is defined by what college you're going to</li><li>• Having a plan post high school</li><li>• 4 year college/university or a known profession</li><li>• Being an honors student</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• RSTA Coop helped me understand if this is really what I want to study in college</li><li>• I feel very prepared for what's next thanks health assisting</li><li>• I feel pretty prepared thanks to all the support I get</li><li>• I don't feel prepared at all because I'm unsure of everything</li><li>• I don't feel prepared</li><li>• Schools should be more involved with preparing seniors for careers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You have to know what you want after high school</li><li>• Getting into a good college</li><li>• Making sure I stay focused in college and don't fall off</li><li>• Finish all 4 years of college</li><li>• To be smart and responsible</li><li>• Living to my fullest potential &amp; doing the things I love</li><li>• Making money</li><li>• Having a well paying job</li><li>• Graduate Nursing school</li><li>• Becoming successful and happy with a career you want</li><li>• Being able to make music and share my art with the world</li></ul>

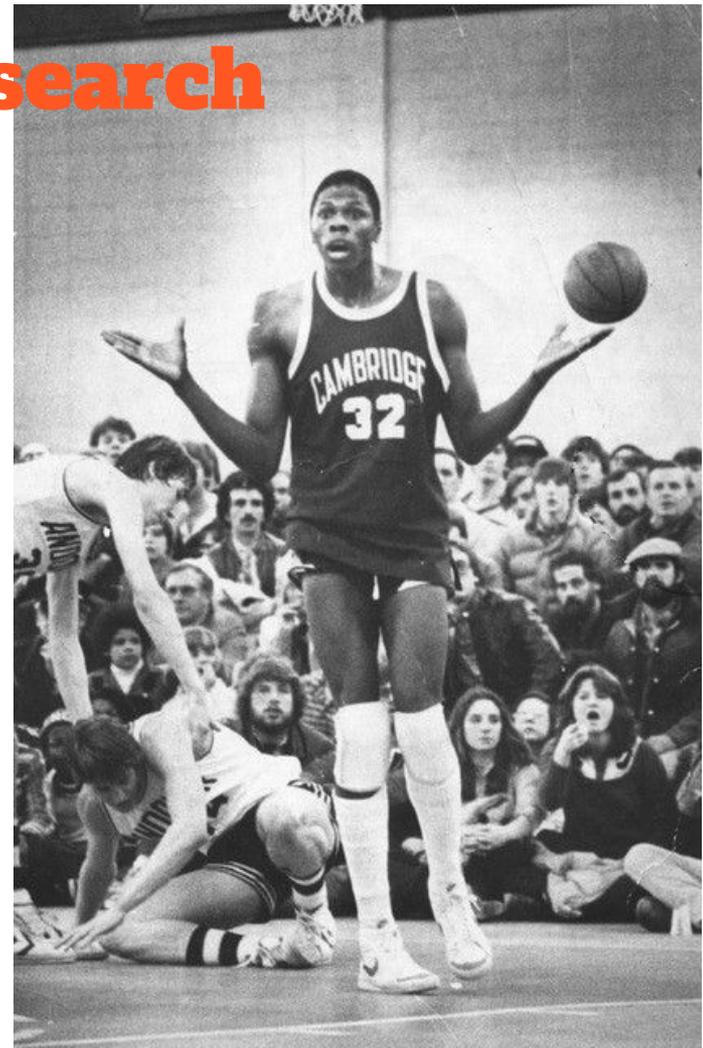
# Implications for Future Research

Conduct interviews and surveys with students, parents and alumni of CRLS who do not identify as American born Black or African American and compare findings.

Interview parents and younger American born Black and African American students around success. Implement preventive and intervention strategies targeted

Implement recommendations and conduct follow-up with students.

Engage the community in action based follow-up.



# Sources

<https://thecambridgeroom.wordpress.com/tag/rindge-tech/> (Slide 9)

[https://crls.cpsd.us/about\\_crls/school\\_history](https://crls.cpsd.us/about_crls/school_history)

<https://cambridge.wickedlocal.com/article/20160331/NEWS/160339487>