Until recently, Bermuda boasted the second highest per capita income in the world, but Black Bermudian males have been unable to secure their fair share of the country’s remarkable economic opportunities. Bermudian men are less likely than their White male peers to work in high paying jobs with international companies or business services and more likely to work in lower paying jobs in construction or trades. With jobs in lower paying occupations, Black males earn less than their White male and Black female peers. These earnings gaps are largely due to differences in educational outcomes (See Figure 1). Black Bermudian females, for example, are twice as likely to complete secondary school and are a third as likely to earn a degree in higher education. Although Bermuda’s White males almost match Black males in not completing secondary school, they are twice as likely to complete the Cambridge School certificate (GCEO/GCEA), which is a necessary credential for an overseas college education.

In order to get a richer understanding of these trends, we conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences and aspirations of Black Bermudian males who were about to graduate secondary school and how their relationships at home and in school contributed to these aspirations.

**Theoretical Framework and Methods**

Developmentally, as adolescents increase their breadth of vision they are likely to have a decreasing sense of certainty about themselves and their relationships. Positive relationships at home and in school help adolescent boys gain clarity around their own thoughts, feelings, desires and resources\(^1\). From this relational orientation, development becomes intertwined with, and negotiated by, the meanings and expectations of others in the greater society. Especially important are assistance with schoolwork and guidance in boys’ academic and career decisions\(^2\). This study examines adolescent development within the microsystem of school and family relationships\(^3\).

In this study, 18 Black male senior secondary school students participated in one-on-one interviews about the academic and career-related support they received from parents, teachers and other school personnel. The students were between 17 and 19 years old and attended one of Bermuda’s two public secondary schools\(^4\).

![Educational Attainment Distribution of Young Adults](image-url)
Educational Aspirations
The seniors planned to graduate and pursue higher education, especially Bermuda College which is free and offers trade certificates and associate’s degrees. Students generally preferred to ultimately attend college overseas but almost all planned to first enroll in Bermuda College to raise their grades, build their resumes, take entry-level college classes, prepare their overseas college or scholarship applications, or simply take time to figure out what they really want to do. However, they perceived Bermuda College to be too laid back and lacking in rigor, and they worried about being ill-prepared for the workforce, so their ultimate aspiration was to go to college overseas.

I would rather go straightaway [to college overseas] to get the experience. I don't wanna be, you know, stuck in Bermuda College all laid back. I wanna experience new things. Cuz college ain't just learning in books, it's about learning in life, too.

Educational Challenge: Maturity
Boys frequently mentioned ‘maturity’ as an obstacle to a successful secondary-school experience. They explained that when they started secondary school, they did not take their schoolwork seriously and were likely to joke around or socialize with their peers. But when they started to think about what they might do after secondary school, often under the influence of an adult in their lives, they took a more determined approach to their studies so they could graduate.

It didn’t really seem too real like everything just kinda hit me like last year. Like everything got real all of a sudden thinking about it like I’m outta here in two years and I gotta make some serious decisions. That’s when it really hit me and I kinda regret goofing off and just doing enough to get by really. Cause like it hit me real hard. I think coming in from middle school like everything seems like a joke, you know?

They explained that many of their friends who did not alter their approach to their studies eventually dropped out of secondary school. In fact, part of the strategy used by boys who were on course to graduate involved putting some distance between themselves and many of their male peers who continued to take school less seriously.

Students in this study suspected that this maturity problem is unique to males and that girls are generally more mature and committed to school. For example, Wesley, age 18, explained that girls are more intelligent in that they have the maturity and sense to stay focused on school, whereas guys get easily distracted.

Mostly guys are all easily distracted, you know. And they worry about this and that, you know. But girls, ah, they get distracted, but they have more sense type of thing, too, like go to school, do what you gotta do.

This male-female differential in maturity is important because it is likely to impact student-teacher relationships, which both our study and the research literature identifies as key to success in secondary school.

Family Support: Stay in school
(1) Mom: High expectations
Almost all of the study participants lived with their biological mothers and reported that their mothers had the most influence over their educational and career decisions. Mothers were especially effective in helping many boys in the sample stay committed to graduating from secondary school, complete the Bermuda College application and take the SAT.
She’s hoping the best for me. Go as far as I can go. Don’t stop... She wants to get me the best education. [She wants you to go to college?] Yea. College, get that top-notch education, make something out of myself.

(2) Dad: Go to college and stay out of trouble
Boys’ contact with their fathers varied from daily to never. But despite the generally inconsistent presence of fathers in many of their lives, boys thought their fathers cared about their education and hoped they would stay in school and out of trouble.

My daddy wants me to go away to college and he just wants me to get outta Bermuda like cause Bermuda’s all, getting all crazy right now. [What do you mean by that?] Like all the trouble that’s going on, beef type of thing. Yea and he’s at the prison also. So he tells me what’s gonna go down and he said during the summertime there might be like, gun war. He thinks it might increase. So he just wants me to get outta Bermuda, just, you know, succeed in life. Just do what I gotta do, don’t do wrong.

(3) Extended Family: Stay Focused On School
Extended family members shared their own experiences and encouraged boys to stick with their education to achieve their goals.

My uncles have told me that they didn’t get to finish school and they’re not in a position that they would like to be in, so if they would’ve finished school they could’ve been a job manager or a CEO of a company, but since they don’t have their secondary school diploma they cannot really go too far in life. [What do they do?] Well, I know one of my uncles pumps gas and one of them he, he drives trucks for a company.

School Support: Stick With It
Teachers, school advisors and school counselors consistently send the message to stick with your education and do not give up. Teachers are particularly hopeful that boys will finish secondary school and go on to higher education so that they will not end up ‘on the wall’.

They [teachers] want to stop seeing the guys just either drop out of high school, or finish high school and just be done with their education, and they want to see the guys go and get those good jobs, like instead of just being thugs and all of that; stuff like that... just worry about your education so it can take you somewhere.

When teachers tell students to stay focused in school, work hard, graduate and go to college, they are communicating to boys a confidence in their ability to accomplish these educational goals. Boys valued the encouragement they received from their teachers and believed that teachers cared about their futures.

Uh, with my mama’s situation. How she’s been in the hospital and stuff. Like that was a reason why I wanted to drop out so I could make some money to help her. But the coach was trying to tell me if I stayed in school, the money that I was going to make, I could make double that if I stay in school and get a secondary school diploma. So he gives me a lot of life stories, too. He’s keeping me on the straight and narrow track... He just tells me stick with it. If you want it, go get it.

We’re Graduating, What Next?
There was a general lack of clarity regarding the process of applying to and choosing a college that would meet students’ professional interests and financial capabilities. At the time of these interviews (towards the end of the school year), only one student had been accepted into an overseas college. Few students had submitted applications or were able to articulate the steps it would take to apply for and finance an overseas college education. Results suggest that parents and teachers are not effectively preparing boys for higher educa-
tion. Results suggest that parents and teachers are not effectively preparing boys for higher education.

I’m applying to college now. I should have been done a long time ago, but I’ve been so busy I couldn’t really get a lot done. Now I’m trying to get it done so I can leave by September. Or not, stay for a year, work, and make some money. I have a job now, so... [If you don’t get into college for dance what else do you think you might want to do?] I’m not even sure. I’m not even thought about a second plan.

Conclusions
Black Bermudian males who are about to complete secondary school have benefited from the support of family members, teachers, and other school personnel. These supporters tell them that they should aspire for education goals beyond secondary school. The educational message of ‘stick with it’ supports secondary school graduation, academic confidence and high educational aspirations, in spite of maturity challenges. However, boys do not report learning enough about the complicated process of college and fellowship applications to make good on those goals. Without a four-year degree, young Black Bermudian males are left ill-equipped for work in Bermuda’s highest paying industries.

Recommendations
Bermudian families should devote more time to helping their sons articulate their goals and find the resources they need to actualize them. This study suggests that mothers, fathers and extended families could all increase their role in the school activities of Black Bermudian males with good result. Organizations working with families should offer ideas of how parents might become more engaged in their children’s education.

Career and college guidance departments in the Bermudian public secondary schools should devote many more resources for ongoing and consistent relationships with Black males. With earlier connections between school performance and college and career aspirations, guidance counselors could promote even greater results. An emphasis on life after secondary school when boys enter secondary school, coupled with ongoing adult support, might help students think about their interests, generate goals, and develop the confidence and skills they need to meet them.

Endnotes
5. The sample represents almost 18% of the entire population of Black male seniors in the two public secondary schools.
7. Future research seeking to understand the experiences and aspirations of Black Bermudian males might include qualitative studies with other samples of the Bermudian population such as girls, White males, first or second year high school students and private school students.

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Opinions, conclusions, recommendations and points of view expressed in this brief represent a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the funders of the study on which the brief is based.

For a full discussion on this topic, please see chapter four of our research study which may be found at www.crfcfw.columbia.edu/pub/Bermuda_full.pdf.