Calvin is a sixth grade Black boy who considers himself to be smart with a little “swagger.” He attends school in an urban school division located in a southeastern state. As an elementary school student, Calvin earned the highest level of achievement on the third, fourth, and fifth grade state standardized mathematics tests. On all objective measures in mathematics, Calvin has performed well and in most cases has excelled. In addition, he has earned good grades in mathematics by earning primarily A’s with an occasional B. Calvin stated that mathematics is his favorite subject and that mathematics comes naturally to him and is easy. He loves challenging mathematics problems and mathematics puzzles.

Calvin’s mother acknowledges that her son is a “busy body” and is in need of a variety of stimulation in order to prevent boredom. She also stated that Calvin needs to feel that his teachers are interested and cares about him in order for him to be productive in class. Both Calvin and his mother admit that he can be a handful in class. Occasionally, he speaks out or is not in his seat at the appropriate time. His behavior is not always that of a model student; however, they believe his behavior is well within acceptable classroom norms.

At the end of fifth grade, Calvin was excited about going to middle school. At that time, teachers identified students to take a mathematics placement test to gain entry into an upper-level pre-algebra mathematics course for sixth graders. Calvin was upset because he was not selected and there were students selected to take the test who he considered were not as “good at math.” Calvin’s mother inquired about the criteria for selection of taking the placement test and discovered that Calvin met all criteria except one, teacher recommendation. Calvin’s fifth grade teacher indicated that although Calvin scored well on assessments, his behavior and his inability to sit still would not make him a good candidate for pre-algebra in sixth grade. In a conference with the sixth-grade guidance counselor, Calvin’s mother inquired about placement in pre-algebra. The guidance counselor responded that she would not want to place Calvin in a class he would not do well. Calvin’s mother felt that the counselor did not consider Calvin’s previous mathematics performance and focused on other things. The principal at the middle school evaluated Calvin’s situation and argued that pre-algebra is a rigorous course for sixth grade students and only disciplined students are capable of passing this course. Even though Calvin had performed well in mathematics throughout his schooling, school personnel focused their attention on behavior rather than academics when evaluating his potential. When the sixth grade school year began, the pre-algebra class had no Black male students.

Calvin’s school district is concerned about the achievement gap. In fact the school division has a goal statement focused on the achievement gap stating “it seeks to understand the causes of this gap in order to devise solutions to reverse it.” Calvin’s story raises questions about beliefs that school districts hold for Black boys. Fortunately, Calvin had a persistent mother who advocated for her son and challenged the school division and Calvin gained entry into the pre-algebra class the second week of the new school year. Unfortunately, Calvin’s story is not unique; Black boys are often confronted with lowered expectations even when they have shown that they are capable of achieving. If school districts are serious about understanding the needs of all students, then they should critically assess possible structural and systemic factors that contribute to access issues that impact Black boys.

**Caroline**

Caroline is a gifted seventh grader who has access to challenging mathematics in both her gifted pull-out program and in her mathematics class. Caroline participates in the pull-out program two days a week with other gifted students. Thus, she and the other students are with their teacher only three days a week. However, her teacher recognizes the importance of differentiating instruction for her students every day. She realizes that she must give careful consideration to this instruction because gifted children require different and more flexible educational experiences. As a result, Caroline’s teacher provides thought-provoking problems and structures them in ways that provide multiple entry points for the whole class. She also encourages her students to demonstrate what they know during small-group and whole-group discussions, creating a safe and respectful environment where all students can solve problems in different ways. This classroom environment makes Caroline truly enjoy her mathematics class because she feels respected, engaged, challenged, and creative. All these elements will allow her to excel in mathematics.

**Craig**

Craig, a gifted seventh- grade middle school student, is not engaged during his mathematics lessons. The content is not difficult for Craig, and his participation is not encouraged. For example, his teacher often says, "Craig, I know you know the answer. I want to see if anyone else knows." This statement and similar comments have taught Craig not to raise his hand in class. In addition, his teacher frequently tells him that he cannot use his mathematics knowledge to reach an answer because some of the other students have not yet learned it. For example, when his class was studying circles, Craig was told not to use pi or his algebra skills to calculate area and circumference. This and similar situations have frustrated Craig. As a result, he has learned not to initiate questions or alternative approaches to solving problems. Later, during the school year, Craig approached his teacher to request some challenging problems to work on independently during class. Although the teacher took additional time to find mathematics problems that would challenge Craig, he asked that Craig solve them outside of class. This gesture helped challenge Craig but did not improve his classroom experience. Craig disliked his middle school mathematics class because he felt that he was not respected, engaged, or challenged. He was also prohibited from solving problems using different methods than those used by his peers. Craig s role in his mathematics class- room had been reduced to observing or tutoring his classmates, rather than learning