ABSTRACT

Nydra Sade' Jones. EQUITY AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT: EXAMINING A SCHOOL-BASED INITIATIVE TO REMOVE ENROLLMENT BARRIERS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler). Department of Educational Leadership, July 2022.

The ongoing underrepresentation of African American (AA) students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses is a well-documented phenomenon. In order to provide a meaningful contribution to this area of research, the focus of practice was studied within the unique context of a North Carolina high school containing a majority African American student population and a large (26) number of face-to-face AP course offerings. The purpose of this case study was to analyze the effects of support and recruitment strategies designed and implemented by a Community of Practice (CoP) within the school while examining the following: the effect of race on African American students' educational experiences and enrollment decisions and the effect school personnel have on African American students' enrollment decisions. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the conceptual framework that guided this focus of practice as CRT has been proven as a powerful explanatory tool in acknowledging the sustained inequity experienced by minority groups and may be used to understand, resist, and overcome educational barriers for marginalized student populations (Parker et al., 1999). Findings of this study support that schools intentionally utilizing a race-conscience approach in their recruitment and recommendation practices and creating systems of student support can have a positive effect on African American AP enrollment. The practice and research implications for educational practitioners have the ability to foster positive social change and reduce ongoing, racial disparities within AP classrooms.

EQUITY AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT: EXAMINING A SCHOOL-BASED INITIATIVE TO REMOVE ENROLLMENT BARRIERS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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EQUITY AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT: EXAMINING A SCHOOL-BASED INITIATIVE TO REMOVE ENROLLMENT BARRIERS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Barbara, Nate, Bronwen, and Nathaniel, Sr.

To my mother, Barbara, the epitome of patience, grace, and class: As a high school English and French teacher for more than 30 years, you demonstrated the importance and rewards of caring for and pouring into your students and community. You have never hesitated to provide support to your children in whatever manner needed. Without your prayers, encouragement, and being an educational exemplar, none of this (my teaching career, my administrative career, and becoming Dr. Jones) would be possible. Thank you, Mom.

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To my father, Nathaniel (Slim), Sr.: The man that gifted me with a sharp tongue, wit, and a laugh that can be heard from a mile away. Unfortunately, you passed away before I could finish this journey, but you've helped me in more ways than you will ever know. Rest easy Dad; we completed the task.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Disparities in educational outcomes and educational opportunities for African American students has an extensive history in the United States. It was only in 1954 that the cornerstone Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, ruled the racial segregation of students in public schools unconstitutional and dispelled the Jim Crow "separate but equal" doctrine. Following this decision, school desegregation and educational equality have been a primary concern in the U.S. educational system with many believing that while strides were made during the Civil Rights movement, racially based educational inequalities continue to exist. These inequalities and disparities have led to the abundantly researched "achievement gap" or "opportunity gap" of African American students in relation to their white counterparts.

Though there is an educational achievement and often an educational opportunity gap against African American students, studies show these students and their parents place a substantial value on education (Anderson, 2018; Coleman et al., 1966). For example, 79% of Black parents with children under the age of eighteen say it is either extremely or very important that their children earn a college degree (Stepler, 2016). In the African American community, education has been promoted as a means to climb the social and socioeconomic ladder and is viewed as a requirement to be part of the middle class and upwardly mobile (Darity et al., 2018; Stepler, 2016). As a result, a large percentage of minority, high school students are consistently informed of the importance of performing adequately in high school followed by obtaining some sort of post-secondary education (Ogbu, 2007; Stepler, 2016). More specifically, most students are urged to obtain a four-year, bachelor's degree as a minimum goal. As a means to this goal, some students opt to enroll in Advanced Placement courses offering college level curricula and examinations through their high school.

Since its inception in 1955, the Advanced Placement program has seen continued growth. The number of high schools offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the amount of AP courses offered, and the number of students participating in AP courses have continued to increase (College Board, 2020). In 2019, approximately 1.25 million U.S. public high school graduates (38.9% of the class) took at least one AP exam, up from 793,300 (26.1%) in the class of 2009. During this time period, the number of high schools participating in Advanced Placement has increased from 17,374 to 22,678 (College Board, 2020). In spite of this continued *overall* growth, African American students continue to constitute the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms (College Board, 2014a). With the growth in opportunity to take advantage of AP course enrollment, a pressing issue continues to be how to address students who have the aptitude and opportunity to engage in AP but choose not to. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge and inspect the role that race and racial discrimination may play in regard to this issue of underrepresentation.

Background of the Focus of Practice

The AP Program was created by College Board in 1955 and is based in the United States and Canada. The AP program originated after the receipt of a grant from the Ford Foundation, which created a Fund for the Advancement of Education in support of research into the possibility of admitting high-achieving, high-school graduates into college with advanced academic standing. Additionally, the AP Program was conceived out of fear the United States was not producing adequate scholars during the outbreak of the Cold and Korean Wars and would not excel politically and scientifically in relation to other regions in the world (Schneider, 2009; White, 2015). The AP program has served as a pillar in mostly middle-class and affluent, majority white population schools. The program served as a mechanism to challenge and

increase the academic rigor of the brightest students. Ideologically, the program was built on the premise that not all students are created equal, and avenues were needed to catapult these students to fulfill their greatest potential (Schneider, 2009).

This changed beginning in the 1990s, due, in part, to bipartisan political support resulting in increased governmental funding, which decreased the amount of examination fees for low socio-economic students. This reform effort expanded AP access beyond private and advantaged suburban high schools (Klopfenstein, 2004a; Schneider, 2009). Additionally, during this time, national efforts were initiated to strengthen the United States' overall educational performance with particular language geared towards increasing AP enrollment. In 1989, President George Bush convened a meeting with all fifty governors in Charlottesville, Virginia and created a set of National Education Goals targeted for the year 2000. The third of these national education goals stated, "By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter…" One specific metric to measure progress toward this third national education goal was the number of students in AP courses (National Education Goals Panel, 1999, p. vi). While not solely for AP enrollment, during the 1990s, many schools restructured their schedule design and transitioned to block scheduling (four 90-minute classes per semester). It was reported that block scheduling may contribute to increased success among students taking AP tests (Guskey & Kifer 1995). North Carolina was an early adopter of block scheduling and holds a relatively high usage rate with more than two-thirds of its high schools operating on a variation of block scheduling (Rettig & Canady, 1999).

As documented on the College Board's website, there are currently thirty-eight AP courses across seven subject categories (College Board, 2019, para. 3). Before providing an AP

course, a teacher must submit a course syllabus to be reviewed through an AP Course Audit process. The syllabus is based on expectations and standards set forth by the AP Program detailing the curriculum covered in the corresponding college level course. Each May, students complete an AP examination in their enrolled course(s) to determine if college credit will be received. On an assessment scale of 1 – 5, students must score a level 3 to obtain college credit. At the discretion of the higher education institution, adequate scoring on these exams may result in a range from college credit to the waiving of required courses (White, 2015). For instance, some highly selective institutions, such as Yale and Duke, allow course credit for scores of 4 or higher, whereas other institutions, such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, only require scores of 3 or higher for course credits, dependent upon the particular course (Lichten, 2000; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2019).

There are varying criteria on the probability of a student choosing to enroll in an AP course. Students may be referred into these courses based on middle school, primarily 8th grade, achievement scores. These students are often enrolled in an "academically gifted" course of study beginning in elementary school which research has shown to underrepresent African American and low-socioeconomic students (Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2001; Hodges et al., 2018). Blame for this academically gifted underrepresentation has largely been cast on identification procedures (Hodges et al., 2018) and societal inequalities (Ford, 2014a; Ford, 2014b). In contrast, African American students are consistently overrepresented in special education (Ford, 2013).

While being placed in an academically gifted program or track may offer students opportunities for acceleration that may benefit them in high school, additional data points are traditionally used to aid in AP recruitment including a student's previous GPA or letter grade, the

corresponding pre-requisite course grade, performance on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) or PreACT, and teacher recommendation. Moreover, some schools allow students to enroll in Advanced Placement courses in high school at their request, and the state of North Carolina exempts both low-income and non-low-income students from paying AP exam testing fees (Zinth, 2016). Following this premise, it seems logical that this student autonomy would lead to greater diversity within advanced level classrooms. The dilemma of why African American students continue to be underrepresented in these courses has yet to be fully interpreted.

Prior research has detailed the correlation between enrollment in Advanced Placement courses and positive educational outcomes including but not limited to: reduced time towards earning a college degree thereby alleviating the cost of post-secondary schooling (Evans, 2018; Santoli, 2002), admission into and attending a 4-year institution (Hebel, 1999; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; Speroni & National Center for Postsecondary Research (ED), 2011), and higher rates of college completion (Ackerman et al., 2013; Adelman & United States. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1999; Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Existing research also delves into AP inequity and the relationship to school and student characteristics. Barnard-Bark et al. (2011) found the number of AP course offerings at a school is inversely associated with the percentage of minority and low-socioeconomic students attending the school. Additional research concludes that disparities in AP access and participation reside in schools that serve low-socioeconomic students and/or predominately African American student populations (Handwerk et al., 2008; Horn et al., 2001; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Klugman, 2013; Zarate & Pachon, 2006).

This study is relevant because of the racial, enrollment disparities that continue to plague the AP program. While targeted efforts have been enacted to increase AP access, the program remains elusive for many African American students (Rowland & Shircliffe, 2016; Terry & Howard, 2013). These targeted efforts are undeterred by research showing African American students are as likely as White students to attend a high school that offers at least one AP course (Malkus, 2016). Consequently, studies have shown that merely increasing the number of AP course offerings does little, if anything, to decrease the enrollment disparity for African American students (Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Malkus, 2016). There is much existing research about the underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses. However, less research has focused on individual choices by African American high school students regarding their decisions to participate in Advanced Placement courses. Additionally, I found no studies examining these decisions within the context of African American students being the majority student population with a large number of available, face-to-face AP courses. The availability of the AP program in a school is a necessary but insufficient factor in promoting student participation.

Statement of Focus of Practice

The Advanced Placement Program has grown significantly since its inception. "This expansion is built on the deep conviction that all students who are academically prepared— no matter their location, background, or socioeconomic status—deserve the opportunity to access the rigor and benefits of AP" (College Board, 2014a, p. 5). In contrast to this expansion motto, studies by Farkas and Duffett (2009) and Igualada (2015) have shown that among teachers who say their schools have a policy encouraging as many students as possible to take AP, respectively 12% and 22% say the main reason is to increase opportunity for

historically neglected students. Ford (2014b) asserted that a group's overall representation in the general populous should have a statistical correlation to the gifted population. This ideology can be made analogous with representation in Advanced Placement courses as well. While comprising 14.5% of the graduating class, African American students represent only 9.2% of the AP exam taker population. They are the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011; College Board, 2014a; Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

One facet of this multi-dimensional dilemma is that some African American students who are capable of completing Advanced Placement level course work are choosing to not attend these courses. Research has shown that simply providing minority students more access to and offerings of AP classes does not generate increased enrollment (Klopfenstein, 2004a; Rodriguez, & McGuire, 2019). Enrollment in AP courses has been linked with benefits and success in high school and in post-secondary education. By not completing higher level courses such as Advanced Placement, these groups continue to have much less access to selective institutions of higher education and, subsequently, to career tracks in many professions that offer promising avenues to leadership positions in many sectors (Patrick, Socol, & Morgan, 2020). Plainly put, these students have a lower probability of being able to move up the socio-economic ladder through post-secondary education.

The problem this study aims to address is twofold; deficient African American AP enrollment and recruitment practices that are not alleviating this enrollment disparity. African American students continue to maintain the majority student population while this deficit endures. The high school for this particular study maintains an informal structure in the overall recruitment of students for the AP program. Moreover, there is no formalized structure for the purposeful recruitment of African American students. A valuable means to improving this

structure and increasing African American AP enrollment is to ascertain how these students make course selection decisions and what factors they consider important in that process. Three major factors which may influence students' participation in AP courses include students' perceptions (Ford et al., 2008; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008; Tyson, 2011), school personnel (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Sebastian Cherng, 2017; Vega & Moore, 2018), and existing recruitment and recommendation practices (Flores & Gomez, 2011; Knight-Manuel, 2019). Data will be collected in phases pertaining to these aforementioned factors and will be analyzed using Critical Race Theory in an effort to show how institutionalized racism, whether overt or covert, may affect African American student enrollment decisions and what may be done to remedy this problem. As explained by Ladson-Billings (1998), while CRT is a powerful explanatory tool to identify problems of race, racism, and social injustice, in the realm of educational equity, CRT must be used as a framework for exposing racism and proposing solutions to address it.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The purpose of this single-case study (Yin, 2014) is to examine and improve the school's recruitment structure for advanced level courses and better understand factors that African American students in one North Carolina high school attributed to their lack of participation in Advanced Placement courses.

Inquiry Questions

The research questions for the proposed study are:

- Q1. How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?

- Q2. What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?
- Q3. How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

CRT principles (Delgado et al., 2017) will be applied and used as a theoretical angle to investigate and explain the data findings addressing each research question. These tenets will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. In accordance with CRT tenets, race and racism are treated as primary casual factors of a continued opportunity gap and continued segregation within advanced-level courses. Hence, the practitioner is more likely to provide recommendations that dispel colorblind and deficit model solutions that continue to reinforce the status quo.

Overview of Inquiry

Focus of practice (FoP) studies are often framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate [CPED], 2018). Some present this type of research as an important and practical way to engage educators, empowering them to design effective practices and become informants to scholars and policy makers regarding critical issues in the field (Rust, 2009).

This study is designed to address a particular focus: the underrepresentation of capable African American students in Advanced Placement courses and identifying factors affecting these students' enrollment decisions including the school's recruitment and recommendation processes. The study sight is a high school located in the Northeastern region of North Carolina and offers the most face-to-face AP classes in the district. The school consistently maintains a

majority African American student population but has an exiguous correlating AP participation percentage.

The inquiry process is designed to address the aforementioned FoP inquiry questions. To complete this process, I will use a qualitative, single-case study design. A case study is the investigation of a bounded system (Creswell, 2012). Data collection and subsequent analysis will be carried out in phases with each phase having a purpose in the cycle of action research. As described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), action research is a collaborative, inquiry process concerned with bringing about change within organizations. It seeks to resolve important social/organizational issues together with those who experience these issues directly.

During the inquiry phases, I will collect relevant data to identify African American students qualified to participate in AP courses. This data will include GPA, standardized test scores, and teacher recommendations. Documents produced and distributed by the participating school related to their AP program will be collected as well. Phases will also consist of conducting semi-structured interviews with African American high school students enrolled and not enrolled in AP courses, AP and AP pre-requisite course teachers, and school counselors. Interviews, along with school documents and procedures, will aid in reviewing the school's overall recruitment and recommendation structure. The data collected in each phase will be analyzed and coded to develop emergent themes. The resulting themes will be categorized and thoroughly discussed in relation to one or more of the CRT framework tenets to determine if African American students are victims of persistent racial inequalities in the research setting. The final phase of this study will be to plan, implement, and present the results of actionable solutions to the school's administration and leadership team so that they may be empowered to

revise their policies and processes for Advanced Placement recruitment with the aim of increasing African American student enrollment.

As a means to maintain overall study rigor, I will maintain an audit trail describing, in detail, how data was collected, recorded, and analyzed throughout the study (Anney, 2014; Merriam, 1995), use multiple data sources allowing for data triangulation (Merriam, 1995), and utilize purposeful sampling procedures and member checking to allow for more in-depth findings in relation to the research inquiry (Anney, 2014).

Inquiry Partners

In the preliminary steps of addressing the FoP, the underrepresentation of African American students in Advanced Placement courses, I have collaborated with a Community of Practice (CoP) professional learning community. This CoP consists of four teachers, one school counselor, and me, the scholarly practitioner, who are all employed at the research site. This group convenes bi-weekly and has gathered and analyzed student data in order to develop a student cohort model aimed at increasing and sustaining minority student, advanced-course enrollment. Along with aiding in student data collection and analysis, the CoP has also collaborated in the review of the school's advanced course referral and recruitment processes. As a practitioner and member of this CoP, I have documented my interactions with the group and documented group progress as a part of my research data and audit trail. The team will collaborate in an effort to develop an actionable plan for increasing minority advanced course enrollment. This plan will include:

- revising the school's recruitment and recommendation structure
- developing a cohort of minority students to attend advanced courses

As outlined, in focus of practice studies, inquiry partners are beneficial components in the collaboration process of developing methods needed to solve problems, think critically, and reach study goals within real world contexts. Partners will assist in efforts of researching, developing, and testing strategies to support the study focus. The following section will discuss the conceptual framework guiding the qualitative analysis.

Conceptual Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) provides an appropriate lens to understand the problem of underrepresentation of African American students in Advanced Placement courses. With origins beginning in the 1970s in the fields of legal studies and civil rights, CRT is a framework which studies the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993). In the realm of education, CRT has been used as an explanatory tool in acknowledging the sustained inequity experienced by minority groups in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation (Parker et al., 1999).

Delgado et al. (2017) outlined five basic tenets of CRT.

1. Endemic Racism - “Racism is ordinary, not aberrational” (p. 8). It is commonplace in society rendering it difficult to address and remedy. Colorblind rules insisting only on equal treatment across the board, alleviate only the most overt forms of discrimination but fail to acknowledge underlining nuances in discrimination. Subsequently, one may pose that all students attending a particular school have the same right to enroll in AP courses; therefore, the dominant society may conclude that racism does not exist in that particular setting. Ford (2014b) proposes that under the pretense of colorblindness, gifted education practices fail to account for cultural differences in the recruitment and retention process. The institution and teachers are

not forced to acknowledge the potential role of racism in the problem. Underrepresentation of African Americans in these courses becomes an *ordinary and commonplace* aspect of the school culture that continues to be ignored, thus normalizing racism and re-segregation within schools and classrooms.

2. Interest Conversion (IC) - the idea that Whites get involved in addressing racism only when doing such benefits them. For instance, Derrick Bell argued that the landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education, was the result of world and domestic considerations and not from a moral awakening by Whites. Ford (2013) addresses how White students benefit from the elite status and instructional advantages associated with gifted education and advanced-level courses. These advantages are viewed as White privileges in which the status quo must be maintained. In some large school districts with ethnically diverse populations, gifted programs have been popularized as a way of providing a type of segregated learning which curtails the prevalence of "White flight". If one considers IC, it can be argued that no significant and sustained gains have been made due to a failure to correlate increased African American enrollment with a substantial benefit to Whites and the ceasing of AP courses as a culturally, elite space for White students.
3. Social Construction - "…race and races are products of social thought and relations" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 9). In short, race does not correspond with genetics and is a construct developed and manipulated by society to maintain a racial hierarchy. Negative stereotypes and deficit-oriented theorizing placed upon African Americans by the dominant society can impact the ways in which they are viewed by others and themselves (Dixson et al., 2016; Martin, 2009; Sebastian Cherng 2017; Vega & Moore, 2018).

Sapon-Shevin (1996) argued that the idea of being "academically gifted" is a social construct due to the subjectiveness of qualifying criteria and how it is often influenced by surrounding cultural and economic context. Correspondingly, African American students may be viewed as not as smart as White students or not capable of handling the academic rigor of an AP course. The racial, social construction of the inferiority of African American students has the ability to aid in ongoing, institutionalized racism.

4. Differential Racialization – "the idea that each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 10). The dominant society's views on various minority groups have proven to shift over time. For instance, the view of a particular minority group may change from non-threatening to threating or from needed to not useful at the discretion of the dominant society.

   In education, differential racialization has brought about a widely accepted and nearly uncontested racial hierarchy. Asian and White students are placed at the top while African American and other minority students are relegated to the bottom. This racialization process perpetuates the social devaluing and deficit-oriented views of students of color (Martin, 2009). In line with social construction, differential racialization may affect the ways African American students are viewed in regard to their ability and belonging in AP courses.

5. Voice-of-Color (i.e., Counter-Storytelling) – The dominant society cannot easily understand what it is like to be nonwhite. When minorities communicate their stories from their prospective, it may provide a useful 'counterstory' to the dominant society's often positivist perspectives.

Counter-storytelling is the methodological practice commonly associated with CRT. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define the counter-story as a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). Counterstories serve as a tool to critique and analyze majoritarian (White) stories that often perpetuate the majoritarian's upheld stereotypes, beliefs and understanding of minorities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Through the process of storytelling, the minority society is given the opportunity to convey their lived experiences and what role they believe race and racism played in those experiences (Terry & Howard, 2013); the majority society is aided in their ability in realizing ways in which they have been complacent in and/or justified their oppression of others (Delgado, 1989). This research will utilize a major tenet of CRT, storytelling, to further explore the experiences of African American students in their course selection process and to explore the ways in which school personnel view their influencing capacity on African American students' enrollment decisions. CRT will also be employed as a framework for examining and improving the current structure used to recommend and permit students into Advanced Placement courses.

Significance of the Study

For African American students, success in high school has become an ever-increasing milestone as the need to complete a post-secondary degree has become nearly unavoidable if one aims to climb the socioeconomic ladder and obtain non-entry level careers. Advanced academic programs, such as AP, have been used as avenues by many students in their college readiness pursuit and are strongly correlated with bachelor's degree attainment (Adelman & United States. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1999; Evans, 2018; Kettler & Hurst, 2017). Due to its rigorous academic curricula, the AP program has been endorsed as a mechanism to

improve students' academic readiness for college, and access to and participation in Advanced Placement has afforded students more success in "college admissions, scholarships, college grade point averages, and college completion rates" (Kettler & Hurst, 2017, p. 3). The academic rigor provided in AP courses serves as an impetus for these benefits; yet the students who could benefit from these courses the most [African Americans] remain underrepresented in these classrooms.

Research has been conducted to demonstrate the impact of AP courses on college success (Ackerman et al., 2013; Adelman & United States. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1999; Attewell & Domina, 2008; Kettler & Hurst, 2017) and to identify the problem of underrepresentation of certain populations in AP classes (College Board, 2014a; Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Kettler & Hurst, 2017; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Whiting & Ford, 2009). However, there is a gap in the research examining factors that limit participation of underrepresented of African American students in AP courses and identifying school-level strategies to reduce disparities.

Exploring the experiences of African American students who are qualified to participate in Advanced Placement courses but choose not to will allow the practitioner the opportunity to gain in-depth data as to the perceived barriers these students face when making their enrollment decisions. Juxtaposing these views and experiences with the views and actions of educators and counselors within the school will allow for a more thorough CRT analysis of possible institutional bias and racism hindering African American students. This insight may provide school officials with valuable information to utilize towards the goal of addressing and rectifying enrollment disparities. In spite of the limitations, the results of this study may be useful for the stakeholders and potentially replicable with other high schools.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

Some of the greatest acts of social injustice and inequity occur in classrooms. The continued disparities in AP enrollment of African American students are just one example of this inequity. AP has become a symbol of excellence and accountability for many schools. The more AP classes a school offers, the better it is believed to prepare students for college. The greater the numbers of minority students who take AP classes and are proficient on AP tests, the more the school is said to be promoting equity. These metrics are important surface level indicators of equity, but the pursuit of social justice requires a much deeper understanding of the AP community, structures, and AP gatekeepers within schools. School leaders need to understand the background and experiences that African American students possess and re-examine school policies and outreach efforts to encourage all of their students to challenge themselves academically. This is a critical step in providing more equity in high schools.

Advances in Practice

Research has shown that simply offering AP courses or increasing the number of AP courses offered does little, if anything, to increase minority student access to these courses (Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Malkus, 2016). While targeted efforts have been enacted to increase AP access, the program remains elusive for many African American students (Darity et al., 2001; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Klopfenstein, 2004b). The College Board strongly encourages educators to make equitable access and restricting barriers to equitable access a guiding principle for their AP programs by giving all willing and academically prepared students the opportunity to participate in AP.

I found no studies examining enrollment decisions or analyzing the AP enrollment structure of schools within the context of African American students being the majority student

population with a large number of available, face-to-face AP course offerings. The availability of the AP program in a school is a necessary but insufficient factor in promoting student participation. Schools should make every effort to ensure their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. The research conducted in this FoP will articulate a method to possibly increase AP access and enrollment for African American students. While no two educational settings are entirely identical, educational practitioners will benefit from methods used to identify, recruit, and retain this underserved population. This research will add to the possibility for additional settings to produce a formalized structure to accomplish this task.

Definition of Key Terms

Academically and Intellectually Gifted – Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the protentional for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment (U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Programs for the Improvement of Practice 1993).

ACT – The ACT is a national college admission examination, first administered in 1959 as a competitor to the College Board's SAT. Students in the 11th and 12th grades are eligible to complete the exam which consists of four multiple-choice subtests: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. The results of this exam are accepted by all four-year college and universities in the United States (Bettinger et al., 2013).

Advanced Placement (AP) Program - The Advanced Placement (AP) Program is a curriculum in the United States that is sponsored by the College Board. This program offers thirty-eight rigorous courses in seven subject categories modeled on a comparable introductory college course in the subject (College Board, 2019).

College Board – The College Board, originally College Entrance Examination Board, is a non-profit organization established in 1900 to simplify the college admissions system process by creating a set of standardized tests in various subjects. The College Board developed and continues to maintain the Advanced Placement Program along with providing several programs and services to aid in college readiness (White, 2015).

Community of Practice (CoP) – A community of participants who collaborate to implement strategies together and collect and analyze data in an effort to solve an identified problem of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2021).

Honors level courses – These are advanced-level courses in high school that, ideally, require a higher level of thinking, progress at an accelerated pace in relation to a standard level course, and provide students with weighted grades which provide a numerical advantage in GPA calculations (Honors Course, 2013).

PreACT – An exam offered to sophomore students as a means to prepare for the ACT. The exam is in a similar format as the ACT and provides students an estimated ACT score that may be used as an indicator for college and career readiness (ACT, 2019).

Assumptions

An assumption underlying this study is the belief that research participants will be willing to openly engage in honest discussions when participating in the semi-structured interviews conducted by the practitioner. To elicit honesty from student interviewees, I will explain that responses are anonymous, and participants will not receive any repercussions for their involvement in the study. Moreover, I will explain the importance of not providing responses the interviewee may feel are socially desirable or prestige biased (Courage et al., 2015).

I am also aware that white fragility is a likely trait that may be demonstrated by some participants. White school officials may feel uncomfortable discussing issues of white privilege and endemic racism in the context of schooling as this may disrupt their views of being colorblind and not complicit with racism. However, Whiteness itself indicates a socialized set of unnamed processes, practices, and power structures serving to favor White people over other races. If white fragility is revealed, this will be treated as an additional data point analyzed through a CRT framework to better understand and address the phenomenon under study. To defeat racism, all forms, both explicit and covert, must be examined even if this arouses strong defensive reactions and/or un-comfortability (Langrehr et al., 2021). It is also an assumption that by using one-one interviews to collect the data, the following will occur: I am able to probe and gain clarification for explanations of responses, non-verbal cues may be recognized and possibly expounded upon, participants will not influence each other's description of their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is the fact that a greater number of participants as well as a more geographically diverse number of schools are not included in the data collection process. The participant pool in this study is limited to ten African American students attending one high school within a North Carolina school district; five students enrolled in AP courses, five students meeting qualifying criteria but are not enrolled in AP courses. The participant pool also consists of five school counselors and six teachers. Student participants not enrolled in AP courses include those whose ACT scores place them in a range that predicts a probability of success in AP courses, have achieved success in Honors and/or standard level pre-requisite courses, middle school enrollment in the academically and intellectually gifted program (AIG), high level standardized test scores, and/or teacher recommendations. The use of this criteria will provide an

unbiased sample of students who have the potential to succeed in advanced placement classes, thereby giving a purposeful, homogeneous sampling population. Although the sample size is limited, Creswell (2012) states that a limited sample size may offer the practitioner more ability to collect, analyze, and present less superficial and more significant results.

An additional delimitation involves the transferability and generalizability of the research results. While cases studies rarely allow for statistical generalization, they have the possibility of providing analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014). Analytic generalization is not generalization to a defined, sampled population, but to a theory of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2014). Hence, generalization and transferability may be determined by the people engaged with the phenomenon (Merriam, 1995). Further, qualitative research may allow partial generalization which make them valuable in the education community (Myers, 2000).

Positionality of Scholarly Practitioner

Practitioner bias and subjectivity is acknowledged due the practitioner being an African American who has matriculated through the public school system and is currently a vice principal at the research site. Notwithstanding, being African American may be of advantage by allowing student participants to more freely express themselves. To diminish the effect of the aforementioned limitation, standard procedures are used in data collection which allows for a comparable analysis of the data (Creswell, 2012).

Summary

The existence of inequity within the Advanced Placement program has been well established through decades of research. A continuing problem within the program is the lack of information available on why certain capable students choose not to participate in AP classes and what strategies are useful in promoting AP participation among minority groups. This study

provides answers to the current disparity trend pervading the AP program in a selected North Carolina high school for the purpose of improving program promotion and student participation. Chapter 2 will provide the context of this study through an examination of relevant literature in reference to African American underrepresentation in AP courses and gifted education, AP relevance and benefits, enrollment barriers, and alternative identification methods for AP recruitment. Methodology for this study is outlined in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 will provide the analysis of the study. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study and explore future implications in the educational field.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While the subject of participation in the Advanced Placement program has received a substantial amount of attention, how high school students make decisions in regard to enrolling in AP classes remains understudied. In this chapter, I examine data and review the relevant literature on interconnected issues relating to African American AP enrollment. This includes an examination of the applicability of critical race theory to the under enrollment of African American students, the importance of AP courses and the underrepresentation of African Americans within these courses, barriers to AP enrollment, and using alternative measure for AP identification.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory brings together the issues of race, racism, and power and seeks to examine how minority populations are negatively affected by these paradigms. At the core of CRT is the belief that racism is inherently woven into our societal structures and racist systems must be understood, challenged, and dismantled (Roithmayr, 1999). Critical race theory has origins in the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement and arrived as a response to what had been deemed a failing civil rights agenda in the United States. In the mid-1970s, while still under the umbrella of CLS, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado and other scholars began work on the theory as they witnessed the civil rights gains produced in the 1960s begin to subside (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Delgado et al., 2017). “After realizing that new strategies and theories were needed to combat the subtler forms of racism” (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 29), critical race theorists began to distinguish themselves from the CLS movement. The CLS movement had been arguably successful in helping to obtain certain legal rights for African Americans by

focusing on "universalism, objectivism, and race neutrality of concepts like 'equal opportunity', 'merit', and 'equal protection'" (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 1); however, critical race theorists realized how these very tenants (i.e., "color-blind vision of race relations" p. 2) were, in fact, bolstering an institution of racial power which perpetuated discrimination. CLS and CRT ideology differed in that the former developed theories between law and social power while the latter believed theories needed to be developed amongst law and racial power. As a self-conscious entity, the CRT movement began organizing in 1989, holding its first conference which focused exclusively on race (Delgado et al., 2017; Roithmayr, 1999).

Critical Race Theory in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) first theorized race as a tool to deconstruct school inequality. While giving credit to both Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois who used race as a "theoretical lens for assessing social inequality" (p. 50), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) realized that race had not yet been employed in the analysis of *educational* inequality. They detailed the intersection of race and property rights and how this construct could be used to understand inequity in schools and schooling. When explaining the intersection of race and property, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) detail four ways in which property functions as whiteness:

- Rights of disposition. Property rights are alienable; hence, [African American] students may be rewarded for acting White or conforming to White norms.
- Rights to use and enjoyment. "In the school setting, whiteness allows for extensive use of school property" (p. 59). For example, White students are afforded a more rigorous curriculum and may be housed in more appropriate settings (i.e., lack of overcrowding).

- Reputation and status property. When schools or programs are associated with *blackness*, they are automatically perceived as being of inferior quality.
- Absolute right to exclude. White society has routinely and systematically developed ways to exclude African American students in education. These methods include(d) maintaining separate schools, attending private schools or schools of choice, resegregation via tracking, and the institution of gifted, honors, and Advanced Placement classes.

Educational-based CRT scholarship has made important contributions to the study of qualitative research. Among the most indicative approaches to CRT application are a form of qualitative research employing storytelling, counter-storytelling, and analysis of narrative (Parker & Lynn, 2002) to identify and confront the subtle and overt forms or racism experienced by students of color. "Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color…" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). CRT advocates often describe the use of minority narrative and storytelling as a way for the dominant group to become aware of oppressive behavior which may be unrealized due to a prevailing mindset causing them to see "current…arrangements as fair and natural" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2,413). Subsequently, over the past two decades, CRT has been utilized in the field of education to study racial inequalities for students of color in numerous areas including educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy (Yosso et al., 2004). The following sections provide an overview of educational-based research related to each of the five tenets of CRT as outlined in the conceptual framework.

Endemic Racism

According to CRT, racism is a normal aspect of American life. Only the most blatant, overt forms of racism garner attention and warrant redress while more subtle, systemic forms are the norm. These systemic forms of racism remain prevalent in many educational settings. Zamudio and Rios (2006) conducted a qualitative study using the journals of hundreds of college students attending one university to examine the racists events that were taking place in their lives over the course of one year. The forms of racism were separated into groups of four descriptive clusters. One cluster revealed that, as seen in many educational settings, the institution propagated forms of "liberal/colorblind racism". Whites simultaneously embraced the notion of equality while benefiting from unearned racial privilege. This colorblind notion of equality allows for the absence of critical analysis of the privileges upholding White supremacy. The authors suggest educators must clearly recognize and communicate the extent that racism persists in their work with students.

Kohli et al. (2017) also point out the normalized facets of racism in K-12 schools. The authors reviewed 186 U.S. focused, k-12 research studies and used their analysis to discuss a "new racism" of k-12 schools. In this new contemporary paradigm, racism is evaded to avoid institutional responsibility, framed through equity in order to maintain and legitimize racism, or practiced "everyday" thereby normalizing its existence. Just as with Zamudio and Rios (2006), the authors stress the importance of school personnel and researchers openly and intentionally discussing, analyzing, and challenging structural racism.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is explained as the dominant society getting involved in addressing racism only when doing such benefits them. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used a CRT framework

to analyze African American students' counterstories attending a predominately White and elite private school. Using several tenets of CRT (whiteness as property and interest convergence), the authors analyzed disciplinary processes, school culture, school policies, and the disingenuousness of liberalism. In the essence of liberalism, schools may adopt a 'colorblind' approach that allows inequity, inopportunity, and oppression to be ignored; racism is not eliminated, and change is incremental, if at all. Through the use of CRT as a framework, it was discovered that 'whiteness as property' was demonstrated in the manner in which administration implemented policies to regulate the ways African American students expressed themselves both verbally and through dress. Via 'interest convergence', African American student athletes communicated their acceptance at the school was only seen as a way to enhance the sports program. In theory, these students were accessing a high-quality education, yet few participated in honors and advanced placement courses. The students' perspectives demonstrated ways in which racism is often subtle but pervasive and how a school culture that supports these forms of racism can negatively affect African American students.

Many resulting actions brought about by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have been presented as examples of interest convergence. Under the federal mandates in NCLB, schools and districts were required to disclose accompanying racial demographic information with their student achievement scores. With schools no longer able to use aggregated achievement data, NCLB exposed achievement gaps and inequities in the schooling experiences of students in the racial minority when attending predominately white schools. These new data points subjected districts and schools to possible sanctions, including a decrease in funding, due to their inability to meet the academic needs of all students (Chapman, 2013). Consequently, interest convergence

was cited as the motivation behind many districts' and school administrators' intentionality in striving to raise achievement scores of minority students.

Social Construction & Differential Racialization

CRT maintains that race is socially constructed in order to differentiate groups in attempts to maintain White superiority or dominance over other groups; the genetic difference among racial groups is negligible at best. Groups may be differentialized based on physical traits, geographic ancestry, cultural features, and/or perceived academic abilities to name a few (Yosso et al., 2004). History has shown that races are largely differentialized in response to the needs of the majority group (Delgado et al., 2017).

Duncan (2002a) used CRT to ethnographically explore the experiences of African American male students at a mid-sized high school in the Midwest. Duncan found that these students are placed "Beyond Love" due to their marginalization being acceptable even in a school setting which prides itself on being caring and high achieving. In their environment, pervasive stereotypes persisted in the language and actions of peers and school faculty. Whether subconsciously or not, African American males were seen as a sort of 'strange population'; naturally, academically, and socially deficient, which made their exclusion and marginalization a natural occurrence largely due to their own transgressions. Duncan (2002a) claims that in these types of settings, "attempts to transform the academic and social experiences of [African American] students…must go further than compensatory programs and professional development workshops" (p. 141). Perpetual microaggressions and the moral dimension of the school must be examined to combat the differential racialization of these students.

In another 2002 publication, Duncan (2002b) discusses pedagogical strategies used with students in preparation for fieldwork in which CRT was used as a theoretical framework and

methodological tool to approach qualitative research. This study was important in demonstrating the relationships researchers hold towards race and how these relationships and views may affect qualitative research and instructional practice. Via students' field notes and course seminar discussions, Duncan realized that several of his students began to feel a sense of false empathy for the research subjects [urban African American elementary students]. Similar to DeCuir and Dixson's (2004) critique of liberalism, Duncan correlates false empathy with liberal ideology. This false empathy allows the dominant society to detach themselves from the realities and unpleasantness of oppression or may allow them to implement well-intentioned remedies that reinforce marginalization and exclusion (Duncan, 2002b). This concept was also explored in relation to teachers' attitudes and perceptions when teaching minority students. The framing of CRT and empathy for preservice teachers was researched, and empathy was most associated with academic and/or social inadequacies rather than on strengths or intelligences; the students are viewed as lacking in some way or fragile. The root issue is that the formation of this empathy is normally not cultivated through interactions with minority communities rendering White teachers unable to truly understand their minority students. Using CRT to investigate the significance of false empathy may "build a teacher workforce more critical and responsive to race in education and [instructional] practice" (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015, p. 289).

Voice-of-Color

Providing marginalized people the opportunity to provide counter-narratives or 'counter-stories' that expose, analyze, and challenge widely accepted majoritarian narratives is a substantial component of CRT (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These narratives have the power to provide valuable, experiential knowledge that may offer important opportunities for new research paradigms, particularly those centered on the manifestations of race and racism.

"Counter-storytelling, in concert with phenomenological approaches to research, encourages individuals to describe and document the specifics of how racism plays out in moments of exclusion, discrimination, perceived racial prejudice or marginalization, or racially hostile learning environments" (Terry & Howard, 2013).

Howard (2008) used CRT as a lens to examine the schooling experiences of African American males. Two hundred middle and high school males were surveyed with a subset of ten students being interviewed for a more in-depth analysis. The subset represented five different schools in a large metropolitan area on the west coast of the US. The study showed that these students were aware of negative, racial stereotypes attributed to them by their teachers and school administrators and that the students have a desire to challenge these stereotypes. The students were also able to give exhaustive descriptions of the racial microaggressions they regularly experienced. Howard speaks on the importance of using reliable research, such as CRT counter-storytelling, that documents where, how, and why race-related problems persist in schools in order to inform educators of these issues.

A study conducted by Anderson (2018) also gives prudence on the importance of schools addressing racial issues and providing students the opportunity to critique and challenge inequitable practices. The study detailed the results of in person surveys administered to 797 low income, African American youth ages 16-20 throughout multiple regions in the US. Findings showed that slightly more than one-third of respondents were concerned that race would limit their educational opportunities. The study also provided a counter-narrative to the common belief that achievement disparities are the result of African American students' disengagement or apathy towards education by determining that nearly 70% of respondents placed school success as a top priority. The author urges districts and schools to challenge deficit-based, educational

views of African American students in order to foster an inclusive environment for these students.

In summary, the conceptual framework of this study is based on the work of a variety of Critical Race Theory researchers and scholars in the field of education. With its origins based in law, this theory has become a reform movement highlighting inequity and the marginalization of African Americans as well as several other minority populations. CRT in education challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. A tenet of CRT states that racism is ordinary and engrained in American society (Delgado et al., 2017); it can become almost unrecognizable in our institutions (Lynn & Parker, 2006). A tenet also states the importance of allowing marginalized groups a 'voice' in which to provide clarity to their daily interactions and experiences (Delgado et al., 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993). Terry and Howard (2013) note the importance of not taking race-neutral approaches in the analysis of marginalized groups' experiences. By using CRT as a framework to listen to African American students who refrain from participating in AP classes despite of the benefits that are yielded from these courses, we may explore this phenomenon without minimizing the role of race in the institution of schooling. CRT allows a lens in which to analyze microaggressions African American students may believe are enacted upon them and how these microaggressions affect their interactions within school and decision to abstain from AP courses. Ultimately, the Advanced Placement program has met an academic standard, but it has failed to meet the equity standard.

The Importance of Advanced Placement Courses and Rigorous Curricula

The need for American students to excel academically and prepare themselves for life beyond k-12 schooling has been an ongoing goal of the American educational system. Several

reports have been created stressing this goal. For example, the Commission on Excellence released a report in 1983 communicating the need for more rigorous high school requirements to prepare the US to compete with its economic rivals. The report described high school curriculum at the time as "undemanding and superfluous" (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983, p. 17) and how extensive student choice resulted in a severe decrease in completion rates in certain courses such as calculus and intermediate algebra. Similarly, the National Education Goals Panel (1999) echoed the need for rigorous curricula in schools and specifically named Advanced Placement courses as a means of measuring this. Thus, Advanced Placement courses have been generally regarded as academically rigorous courses for high school students.

Though there has been some debate, since its inception, the College Board's AP program has been touted as one of the best ways for high school students to gain exposure to college-level coursework that helps to accelerate learning and helps to prepare students for more challenging academics in the future; it has expanded to almost every high school in the United States (Ndura et al., 2003). While being exposed to this more rigorous coursework and curriculum, it has been posed that students may also have access to the most effective teachers as these teachers are most often assigned to teach advanced academic courses (Long et al., 2012). Research shows that taking AP courses in high school has positive implications for college admission and attendance. Klopfenstein and Thomas (2009) explain how taking AP courses are a way for students to differentiate themselves from other students in the college application process; a form of 'signaling' in the college application process. The successful completion of AP courses holds economic benefits as well. For instance, students may graduate early, double major, and/or take

more advanced math and laboratory science courses without increasing college costs (Evans, 2018; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009).

Chajewski et al. (2011) found a substantial (171%) increase in the odds of attending a 4-year postsecondary institution with the completion of a single AP exam. In a study investigating the way college students perceive their experiences in high school AP courses, participants largely agreed that AP courses were beneficial in improving specific academic skills (writing, test taking, work revision, time management, analyzing, and critical thinking) and bolstering their confidence that they could be successful in college (Cooney et al., 2013); 93% reported their AP courses being of a higher quality than their other high school courses. In addition to the potential academic benefits of being exposed to college-level coursework, students may benefit from AP classes in other ways as some high schools assign greater weight to AP courses when calculating cumulative GPA, using a 4.5 or 5.0 as the maximum GPA rather than the traditional 4.0.

As previously stated, there is debate surrounding the actual benefits of AP courses (Gallagher, 2009; Lichten & Wainer, 2000; Tai, 2008). Warne (2017) noted that AP program research has largely been conducted by College Board researchers or "written under the assumptions that the AP program is beneficial and that success in the program was prima facie a good thing for students" (p. 2). Some studies acknowledge no significant positive effect of AP courses on college success when controlling for various factors (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). Tai (2008) questions if high school educators can offer the same unique instructional fervor, content comprehensiveness, and deep, complex knowledge that a college professor may hold for a particular subject. This is in part due to a study in which Tai found that of students scoring a 5 on AP examinations, only about half earned an A in the same college course. By using graphical

information provided in the 10th annual North Carolina AP Report (College Board, 2014b), the practitioner found that while AP participation has increased in North Carolina, the practitioner's study site state, the success rate has slightly fallen. Interestingly, this is not explicitly stated in the report and is framed as more students are succeeding in AP Exams in 2013 than took them in 2003. Lichten (2000) argues how the AP exam grading procedures, legislative mandates, and rapid expansion have decreased program quality and suggests implementing major reforms to reestablish quality.

Regardless of disagreements around the effectives of the AP program, the ability of African American students to be exposed to a rigorous, college level curriculum and to earn college credits through AP participation makes AP enrollment an important topic of study.

> The impact of a high school curriculum of high academic intensity and quality on degree completion is far more pronounced – and positively- for African American…students than any other pre-college indicator of academic resources. The impact for African American…students is also much greater than it is for White students. (Adelman & United States. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1999, pp. vii)

African American Underrepresentation in Advanced Placement

The racial disparities between minority groups of students and White students in the enrollment and successful completion of AP courses has been researched and well documented. Beginning in 2005, the College Board has provided yearly reports (AP Report to the Nation) and has archival data dating back to 1997 showing the trends of AP enrollment and successful completion of courses. Reviewing this data consistently informs on the underrepresentation of the African American student population in AP courses and examinations. In 2004, African American students constituted 13.2 % of the student population but represented only 6% of the

AP examinee population. In that same year, African American students held the largest equity gap in the nation and in North Carolina (College Board 2004a; College Board, 2004b). In 2013, the AP report shows that African American students made up 14.5% of the student population and 9.2% of exam takers while still representing the largest equity gap in the nation and in North Carolina (College Board, 2014a; College Board, 2014b). Several states have managed to eliminate the participation and success gaps for Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaska Native students, but the College Board provides no specific information on how this was achieved. Only one state, Hawaii, has closed this gap for African Americans (College Board, 2014a). This gap closure could, in part, be due to the low number of African American students represented in Hawaii's overall student population. During the time of the data collection, African American students accounted for only 250 students of a graduating class totaling 10,741; out of the 250 students, 78 participated in AP examinations.

Racial disparities in the program persist despite years of efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to incentivize the expansion of AP. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 disseminated 3-year competitive grants to state educational agencies, local educational agencies, or national nonprofit educational entities to implement a comprehensive approach to expand AP access to low-income students. Similarly, the Obama administration's ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) which is the reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), enacted a Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program. Under this program, states and districts may use Title IV, Part A funds to provide funding for exam fees in any schools and increase student access to rigorous, post-secondary level curricula.

Klopfenstein (2004a) stated that most AP incentive program funding during the 1990s was used to subsidize test fees and offered no real incentives for schools to expand AP course

offerings. Test examination fees were not usually the foremost barrier, and funding did not address this issue; minority populations failed to enroll in AP courses due to a lack of academic preparation necessary for college-level performance. In the study of Texas public schools, Klopfenstein tied AP allocation and growth to student body expectations to attend college, school size, and school resources. Because African American students attend college at lower rates than White students, schools serving majority African American students had lower amounts of AP offerings. This was analogous to schools serving a large percentage of special education, Limited English Proficient, low income, and rural school students as well. When mixed-raced schools experienced AP opportunities comparable to White schools, it was usually the result of the White school being small and located in a rural area. School size was positively associated with AP growth and allocation due to large schools having the property tax base to garner greater resources for particular student subgroups making it relatively inexpensive to add AP courses.

Darity et al. (2001) examined the Advanced Placement disparities in North Carolina's public schools. For schools offering the AP Courses of Biology, English, Calculus, and History, more than 40% fell into a range of no minority representation to having only one-fifth of their overall minority population represented. Similar to Klopfenstein (2004a; 2004b), the researchers were able to correlate AP course offerings to certain school characteristics. Larger school size and an urban location were indicative of more AP course offerings. In addition, schools offering more AP courses had a slightly higher minority presence than the minority presence in schools offering fewer courses. Darity et al. (2001) concluded that because minority students' presence is greatest in larger, urban schools, ultimately, minority students are more likely to attend schools

offering a greater variety of AP courses. Consequently, their underrepresentation cannot be completely attributed to a lack of course offerings in the schools they attend.

Barriers to Advanced Placement Enrollment

It has been a long-standing issue that minority students are underrepresented in the Advanced Placement program. So much so, that the College Board addresses the removal of barriers for traditionally underserved groups in their Equity and Access Policy Statement. Schools are urged to make every effort to ensure their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. Nonetheless, while AP course taking percentages continue to increase for all groups of students, the participation rate gaps between races continues to persist over time. Even students identified as high achieving when entering high school are less likely to enroll in advanced coursework. Barriers to African American AP course enrollment have been attributed to several factors including, but not limited to, AP course access, academic preparedness, academic tracking, lack of awareness (teachers, parents, and/or students), insufficient motivation, and failing to identify potential students (Darity et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Malkus, 2016). The following portion of the literature review details research related to these determinants.

Educator Bias in Academically Gifted Identification

Enrollment in a gifted program in elementary or middle school is often a precursor to enrollment in higher-level courses in high school. In many cases, students' access to rigorous courses has a lot to do with their experiences prior to attending high school. Students' placement in elementary school is the initial sorting process that sets racial groups on different academic paths. This sorting becomes even more apparent in secondary school where students are separated for instruction using a range of criteria including perceived ability, prior achievement,

and/or post-high school occupational plans and aspirations (Tyson, 2011). In some instances, this has led to a form of segregation within schools, most notably in Southern and Border region states. Racialized tracking has caused many racially diverse schools to lack true integration. Charles Clotfelter's (2006) research indicates that within-school segregation increases as the percentage of African Americans in the student body increases. According to Clotfelter, schools between 30% and 60% African American show the highest rates of within-school segregation, and this segregation is most prevalent within high schools. In this model, African American students are less likely to be assigned to advanced and honors classes and are more likely to be assigned to special education tracks. When it comes to high school course-taking, academically prepared students have a huge advantage over less prepared students. Students who start high school as high-achieving are substantially more likely than those who start out as low-achieving to complete advanced course work (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014).

In a qualitative study conducted by Tyson (2011) on the course selections of sixty-one North Carolina high school students, students identified as gifted were significantly more likely to enroll in AP courses. To further explore this correlation, Tyson and colleagues analyzed statewide data (2002-2003) of more than 43,000 North Carolina high school students.

> Using logistic regression to predict the odds of taking an AP class, we found that even after controlling for students' race, parent education, and previous achievement (measured using grades 3 – 8 math and reading test scores), the odds of taking an AP course were significantly higher for students who had been identified as gifted. (Tyson, 2011, p. 146)

Due to the gateway tendencies of the gifted education program, it is a troubling issue that "educators and decision makers have consistently failed to identify and serve a representative

and equitable percentage of [African American students] as gifted" (Ford, 2014a, p. 102). A factor in this failure has been linked to deficit ideology in which educators hold a stereotypical view that African American students lack the intellectual capacity to be successful in gifted programs (Henfield et al., 2008; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). It is a way to blame minority students completely for their academic problems while structural inequalities remain blameless. Ford (2014a) attributes this type of deficit ideology due to teachers' misunderstanding of African American students' cultural differences. These cultural differences lead to deficit-oriented paradigms of elitism, lowered and negative expectations, misinterpretations, and cultural clashes which, in turn, lead to the under-referral of African American students for gifted education screening, assessment, and services. According to Ford (2013), deficit thinking is the utmost barrier to recruitment and retention for Black students, followed by their income and/or socioeconomic status.

Ford (2014b) proposes that under the pretense of colorblindness, gifted education practices fail to account for cultural differences in the recruitment and retention process. Giftedness is "defined and measured by the majority culture" (Fletcher-Janzen & Ortiz, 2006, p. 138); therefore, it has been argued that many of the established intelligence tests have built in bias. Minority students have generally not scored as well as White students, and teachers fail to identify gifted students not of their own culture. Ford (2014b) questioned if underrepresentation would decrease if teacher referrals were eliminated and alternate screening instruments implemented.

Vega and Moore (2018) found that African American males often experience implicit bias from teachers and stereotypical beliefs about their intellectual ability which hinders their academically gifted placement. The authors elaborated on how access to gifted/talented and

Advanced Placement courses has shown to be limited as African American students' overall school population is routinely higher than their enrollment in these programs. Lohman (2005) elaborates on alternative methods that may be used in the identification of underrepresented minorities in gifted education. He suggests that many of these students fall into a 'high potential' group who do not currently exhibit academic excellence in a particular domain but have the potential to display this given they put forth the required effort and are given proper educational assistance.

In his 2017 study, Sebastian Cherng used data from the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 to determine teachers' perceptions of the academic abilities of students belonging to different racial/ethnic groups and to determine the effects teachers' perceptions have on student academic expectations and GPA. Using the data base of high school sophomores, Sebastian Cherng employed a two-state sample selection process to determine study participants. First, schools were selected with probabilities proportional to the size of student enrollment followed by the selection of twenty-six students from each school. Results showed that math and English teachers are more likely to perceive their class as too difficult for African American students when compared to White students; these students are more likely to be underestimated and viewed as less academically capable by teachers across subjects. Student academic expectations and GPA are also negatively affected by teacher bias resulting in lower 12th grade expectations (years of education expected by student in the 12^{th} grade) and 10^{th} grade GPAs; however, this correlation was smaller for African American students than other minorities. Sebastian Cherng attributes this to the academic strategies these students use to combat racial discrimination in education which may be unique to this group seeing as they have a long history with discriminatory practices within the institution of schooling.

While negative teacher bias can be extremely detrimental in the identification of gifted students and student achievement, supportive teachers can have a substantial positive affect on academic outcomes for minority students. Teachers often exhibit higher expectations through the learning opportunities they provide. In 1968, Rosenthal and Jacobson released an influential study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, one of the first to provide overwhelming evidence that teacher expectations can significantly affect student achievement. The researchers gave teachers false, nonexistent information about the IQ results of a randomized selection of students and indicated that those students had high intellectual capabilities based on said IQ results. Those students whom teachers expected to perform well showed significantly higher gains (over 12 IQ points) than their classmates (over 8 IQ points) at the end of the year. Moreover, minority students who were Mexican, in the context of this study, "were more advantaged by favorable expectations than were the other children" (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, p. 20).

More recently, McKown and Weinstein (2008) examined the relationship between teacher expectations and student ethnicity and the effect of this relationship on the end-of-year achievement gap. In classrooms where students reported high levels of differential teacher treatment (PDT), the different expectations teachers held for children from minority groups and their non-stereotyped peers with identical prior achievement levels may contribute up to .8 grade with an average of .6 grade equivalents to the year-end achievement gap. This is a substantial gap attributable to different expectations for equally achieving children from different ethnic groups and is another example of how consecutive and consistent years of biased treatment and lowered expectations for students can pose effects well into their high school years. Ultimately, teachers' expectancies may lead to differential academic performance of children and are likely

to contribute to a less than fair classroom climate and limited educational opportunities for African American students.

Student Perceptions

It has been documented that students, both high-ability and non, take many factors into consideration when deciding on their academic pathway. When enrolling in AP courses, students routinely fear the feelings of alienation as being one of the few or only African American in the classroom (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Often, it has been posited that African American students reject achievement behaviors that may be in conflict with cultural expectations allowing them to maintain a sense of belonging and identify within their cultural group. Professor John Ogbu described the mindset behind this rationale as developing an oppositional identity resulting in minority students rejecting the pressure to "act White" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The desire to avoid alienation, isolation, and rejection plays a critical role in the decisions gifted African American students make relative to staying success oriented and academically focused (Ford et al., 2008).

In the study conducted by Ford et al. (2008), a sample size of 372 grades 5 -12 gifted African American students in two school districts were surveyed on their perceptions of factors that affect their academic achievement. Nearly one-fourth of students admitted to not putting forth their best effort in school, most reported knowing someone who has been ridiculed for doing well in school, and nearly all associated negative perceptions and stereotypes of acting Black (low intelligence, disinterest in school and achievement, poor language skills) and positive perceptions with acting White (intelligence, well behaved, doing well academically). While the students associated whiteness with positive characteristics, they also attributed acting White to

being arrogant and believing yourself to be better than others. When asked why capable students do not perform well, students overwhelmingly cited peer pressure as the most influential culprit.

In contrast to the large role that peer pressure and culture identity can have on students' high school course selection, Tyson (2011) found that peer pressure is a concern for some African American students but is not a primary consideration when opting out of advanced level courses. In order to gather information on course selection deliberations, Tyson conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a racially mixed group of sixty-one male and female students with enrollments across six North Carolina high schools. From these interviews, a common theme emerged that students enrolled in courses they felt would be most comfortable for them socially and in courses they felt they had the largest chance of success. Students choosing to enroll in advanced classes typically had previous experience in gifted and advanced classes and had grown accustomed to the network of friends and/or peers who regularly enrolled in these types of classes. Their experiences in the gifted program and/or advanced classes gave students a higher level of academic confidence causing them to believe they would receive continued success in this environment. For many African American students in advanced courses, their desire to achieve outweighed their need for social comfort. Students who chose to engage in lower-level courses were concerned about their competence level and feared not performing well in advanced classes.

In addition to feelings of alienation and a lack of belonging minority students experience in relation to advanced level courses, research has also shown that African American students may hold ambivalent beliefs towards the value of education; beliefs which are transferred to them through their parents' language and actions. Parents may endorse engaging in the requirements for school success, but this is contradicted by their "experiences with society and

by the failure of schooling to lead to economic rewards for them" (Obgu & Simmons, 1998, p. 178). For instance, "on average, a Black household with a college-educated head has less wealth than a white family whose head did not even obtain a high school diploma" (Darity et al., 2018, p. 6). While education has been viewed as the vehicle to improve economic and social status, more often than not, education has not accomplished this goal for this group. With the backing of an appropriate education, African Americans have faced discrimination preventing the attainment of desirable jobs, good wages, and promotions. Even with an education, African Americans may feel they have limited economic and mobility opportunities which cause them to foster a disillusionment for education (Ogbu, 2007). This disillusionment may lead to reduced efforts which affect students' desire to seek their fullest academic potential. Tyson (2011) challenges this ideology stating that the percentage of African American high school and college graduates has continued to increase at record levels since 1970. Tyson correlates this statistic with the idea that African Americans generally accept the value of formal education as a vehicle for upward mobility and asserts there is a lack of evidence that the rejection of education is passed down from generation to generation.

School Personnel

Handwerk et al. (2008) stated that in order for more students to reap the benefits of the AP program, schools need to do more to create an "AP culture" within their schools. In essence, creating an AP culture entails creating a college-going culture in which high school students are fully supported in obtaining high academic achievement starting in the 9th grade. The role of the principal in mobilizing and guiding the comprehensive organizational reforms that distinguish college-going cultures from other readiness approaches is significant. School leaders, especially when serving minority and low-income populations, must be intentional when preparing students

for postsecondary enrollment (Knight-Manuel, 2019; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Flores and Gomez (2011) suggest that in order to build a school's AP program, school leaders should develop educational infrastructures in middle and high school to better prepare students for advanced course work (i.e., adequate prerequisite classes), dispel the notion that AP classes are only for the top students, and ensure students and parents (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008) are aware of the benefits of the AP program.

Another important facet for school leaders to consider includes capitalizing on the experience, influence, and expertise of school counselors. As part of a comprehensive school counseling program, along with school administrators, counselors are charged with ensuring equitable access to a rigorous education for all students (ASCA, 2012). School administrators must ensure counselors' time is allocated to college-going activities, aligning support services with academic achievement, and monitoring the college-going culture (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Because of the school counselor's often critical role in AP enrollment, researchers have suggested that school counselors are in a unique position to reverse institutional barriers and challenge the deficit thinking that propagates the AP equity and success gaps for African American students (Ndura et al., 2003). Camizzi et al. (2009) found that school counselors played an integral role in encouraging the selection of more rigorous coursework among minority and economically disadvantaged students. Much of this is accomplished through administrators, teachers, and school counselors collecting and analyzing data on participation and achievement disparities for African American students in advanced programs and what interventions may minimize these disparities (ASCA, 2012; Camizzi et al., 2009).

Generally, while today's student course selection process is not as rigid and students may not be 'formally' placed on academic tracks as was the case in the past, school personnel

continue to play a vital role in students' decisions to participate in advanced-level courses. Input from educators and school administrators continues to play a key role in the courses students take. Their recommendations guide students' selections, and their signatures often are required for enrollment in advanced courses. Though students and parents have the ability to play a more active role in the course selection process, school personnel may still serve as gatekeepers that, more often than not, exclude African Americans in advanced level curricula.

Using Alternative Measures for Advanced Placement Identification

Many schools use a set of pre-determined data points including, but not limited to, GPA/grades, standardized test scores, and/or teacher recommendations in the process of allowing students to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. Research shows that these methods are not always adequate in identifying and recruiting minority students. Sidney Vaughn (2010) has made the point that GPAs are increasingly unreliable in determining students' true academic ability as, over time, high school grades have continued to increase without the same relative increase in objective measures of achievement. Ford (2013) has argued that alternative measurements and instruments need to be utilized in order to address certain social and ethical considerations when identifying minority students for AIG placement. One piece of information cannot be efficacious in making defensible, effective, and appropriate decisions. Multiple data points must be collected and used in a comprehensive method to make equity-based decisions. Due to this, the author proposes that alternative measures may become more important in identifying students for advanced course taking.

One method that schools can identify more students for participation in the AP program is through the use of College Board's *AP Potential*. *AP Potential* is a web-based tool that aids schools in identifying possible AP students. Schools are given the capability to generate rosters

of students who are likely to score a 3 or higher (out of 5) on a given AP exam based on their PSAT/NMSQT score. These reports are provided unrecompensed to all schools who administer the PSAT to their students. The Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is a practice college entrance exam given to students before they take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The PSAT "measures skill in verbal reasoning, critical reasoning, math problem solving, and writing" (Sidney Vaughn, 2010, p. 396). Several research studies have shown a strong correlation between students' PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP examination results (Camara & Millsap, 1998; Ewing et al., 2006; Lichten & Wainer, 2000; Palin, 2001). Using *AP Potential*, the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), a coalition of 76 of the nation's largest urban public school systems, was able to identify the numbers of the 2014 class of minority students (Black, Hispanic, and Native American) who had the potential to succeed in AP courses but did not enroll. Their analysis found that African American students have the greatest percentages of non-enrollments of each core subject area of all the minority groups in the study (College Board, 2015). The use of PSAT scores to determine *AP Potential* is important because the scores call to attention "students who may not have been initially considered for AP courses through teacher nomination, self-nomination, or other local procedures" (Camara & Millsap, 1998, p. 22); procedures that are deemed necessary to maintain AP's reputation as a merit-based accomplishment, but in reality, function to exclude many [minority] people (Starr, 2017).

Similar to using students' PSAT exams to identify correlations between test scores and Advanced Placement success probability, PreACT or Plan scores may be used in the same manner. Developed in 2016, the PreACT is a relatively new exam created to assist students, primarily 10th graders, in preparing for the ACT college entrance exam. The PreACT is a

multiple-choice assessment measuring student ability in the areas of English, math, reading and science. ACT (2009) examined the relationships between students' scores on the PreACT and their scores on selected AP Exams; 34,336 student PreACT and AP scores were matched with findings indicating a strong correlation between the two data points. Using logistic regression, the researchers were able to predict the probability of at least 50% success of students earning a 3 or higher on particular AP exams. ACT (2009) suggests using this information to make students aware of possible AP courses available to them, and when applicable, encourage students to complete high school coursework necessary to prepare them for certain AP courses, thereby improving their college readiness.

States have varying mandates regarding the SAT and ACT, resulting in varying usage of the PSAT and PreACT. As of 2018-2019, 24 states and the District of Columbia include the SAT and/or ACT in their testing requirements. This number is a substantial increase from the seven states using these exams in the previous decade (Gewertz, 2017). Ultimately, the PreACT and *AP Potential* are both useful tools as they may be used to allow underrepresented minorities, especially African American, the opportunity for improved educational opportunities.

Summary

Understanding the historical framework in relation to AP course enrollment for African American students provides a pragmatic view of the present encounters these students are experiencing in public schools within educational systems. The literature shows that the history of underrepresentation, influence of race, benefits of advanced course work, barriers to advanced course enrollment, and alternative identification methods are vital in learning how African American students dictate their decisions regarding their academic growth. There is a need to develop sustainable methods to ensure appropriate minority representation in advanced-level

courses while ascertaining why many African American students who are academically equipped for Advanced Placement courses are not enrolled in these courses that will, to a greater degree, prepare them for post-secondary success.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Racial disparities have been a component of the Advanced Placement program since its inception (College Board, 2014a; Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Kettler & Hurst, 2017; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Whiting & Ford, 2009). The purpose of this single-case study (Yin, 2014) was to examine the school's current recruitment structure for advanced-level courses and better understand factors that African American students in one North Carolina high school attributed to their lack of participation in Advanced Placement courses. Research has concluded that racial, enrollment disparities continue to plague AP program. While targeted efforts have been enacted to increase AP access, the program remains elusive for many African American students (Darity et al., 2001; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Klopfenstein, 2004b). Conversely, several studies have reported AP growth (College Board, 2020), but little attention has been paid to school- and classroom-level strategies that encourage students to enroll into AP courses. Critical Race Theory was used a framework to analyze study data as a means to demonstrate the effects of institutionalized racism on the research site's AP recruitment and enrollment structures. Using this framework, AP recruitment strategies will be implemented and evaluated to determine their effectiveness with regard to African American students. This chapter will present an overview of the focus of practice inquiry design. A background of the school, student participants, and staff participants will be given, as well as an overview of the projected data collection and data analysis methods.

This study is guided by the following questions:

- Q1. How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?

- Q2. What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?
- Q3. How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

Inquiry Design and Rationale

Problem of practice studies address a specific issue embedded in the work of the professional practitioner resulting in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes. The focus is to make improvements in a specific educational context by providing suggestions for improved practices based on study findings (CPED, 2018). The single case study was the qualitative design used to address the problem of practice. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon or case in depth and within the real-world context (Yin, 2014); it aims to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach allows individuals to speak in their own terms in interviews so that their distinct perspectives are understood. It allows the researcher to examine the extent to which "actions and outcomes are produced by people interpreting situations in diverse ways and acting on the basis of these interpretations" (Hammersley, 2013, p. 11).

In addition to the qualitative case study design, the practitioner engaged in action research with inquiry partners. Action research is concerned with solving organizational problems and bringing about change within organizations. A scientific approach is used to study the resolution of important social or organizational issues together with those who experience these issues directly. Action research works through a cyclical, four-step process of continual (a) planning, (b) taking action, (c) evaluating the action, (d) further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

As the practitioner, I conducted multiple phases of inquiry in the process of completing the continual four-step, cyclical action research design. It must be noted that two action research cycles may operate in parallel as this research is conducted in the present tense (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). As I and inquiry partners engage in the focus of practice, a simultaneous cycle is completed while reflecting on what is being learned and on the progression of the focus of practice. The multiple phases of inquiry and information provided on the context and background of the focus of practice are established as a means for the practitioner to rigorously and systematically describe the intentions, planning, action, and outcomes of this study.

Through the utilization of an action research approach within a case study methodology, this study aimed to improve the school's current recruitment structure for advanced level courses and better understand factors that African American students attributed to their lack of participation in AP courses. This led to the creation and implementation of a process for increasing African American AP enrollment. In alignment with action research, this process was evaluated on its effectiveness and plans for improvement were produced as needed.

The research design incorporated collaboration among the practitioner and inquiry partners. These inquiry partners consisted of three AP teachers, one school counselor, and one non-AP teacher. This team will be referred to as a Community of Practice (CoP). This CoP developed as means to address an identified educational problem of practice. Once the CoP identified this problem, the school principal and leadership team consented for the CoP to plan, collect data, and implement strategies to solve this identified problem. Inquiry partnership participation was documented through my CoP meeting notes and through the inclusion of documents created and activities planned by this group. The CoP's intent was to work to establish an improved AP recruitment and retention structure with the aim of increasing minority

student AP enrollment and success. The following is a brief description of this study's inquiry partners.

Inquiry Partner #1: Ms. Jordan is a White female social studies teacher whose only instructional course is year-long AP course. She has 20 years of teaching experience, is the Social Studies department chair, and is involved in various school initiatives designed to improve academic outcomes.

Inquiry Partner #2: Mr. Cook is a White male science teacher and teaches several standard courses along with an AP Science course. He has 15 years of teaching experience and is currently pursuing a school administration degree.

Inquiry Partner #3: Mr. Murray is an African American male Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher. He does not teach any AP courses, serves as a school athletic coach, and has 6 years of teaching experience.

Inquiry Partner #4: Mr. Reed is a White male CTE teacher and teaches an AP CTE course along with several sections of CTE honors level courses. He is the CTE department co-chair, FBLA advisor, a school athletic coach, and has 15 years of teaching experience.

Inquiry Partner #5: Ms. Long is a White female school counselor responsible for overseeing the course enrollment and academic progress of students with last names pertaining to a specific portion of the alphabet. Her responsibilities include, but are not limited to, being a member of the school's scheduling committee and leading the school's newly created Equity Committee (started in spring 2021). Ms. Long has 7 years of school counseling experience.

Q1 Design and Rationale

During the first phase of inquiry, I investigated the demographic characteristics of African American students enrolled in the research site and reviewed the school's AIG data,

standardized test scores (ACT/EOC/EOG), honors level course enrollment, and AP course enrollment. Question 1 was analyzed by conducting individual, semi-structured interviews with student participants. Student participants were those both enrolled and not enrolled in AP courses. Students not enrolled were selected based on criteria (AIG, standardized test scores, success in honors level course(s)) deeming them having the ability to successfully complete AP coursework. Additional consideration was given to students enrolled in honors level courses as these courses are viewed as gateway courses for AP enrollment at the research site. A total of ten African American students were selected ranging in gender and grade levels 11^{th} – 12^{th}. The research site has a very limited 9^{th} grade AP population, and there were no 9^{th} grade, African American AP students during the time of this study. I contacted students in school to distribute proper student and parent consent forms (see Appendices C and D) to be signed upon participation agreement. Interviews did not exceed 30 minutes.

In qualitative studies, the practitioner is the key instrument and does not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other practitioners (Brinkmann, 2013; Creswell, 2013). For this study, a semi-structured interview instrument was created. The semi-structured interview's purpose is to obtain and interpret the meaning of described phenomena and is the format most associated with qualitative studies. It allows for better use of dialogue by allowing more freedom for following up on information the interviewer deems meaningful to the research study (Brinkmann, 2013). Moreover, participants are afforded the flexibility to address issues that might not otherwise be asked in the protocol. Congruent with qualitative study methodology, open-ended, nondirective questions were designed and used to interview participants (see Appendices E - I). The instrument was refined through the use of pilot testing (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014) in order to determine if questions adequately addressed the inquiry questions and

assess practitioner bias. I interviewed two students based at a neighboring high school with comparable student demographics to determine if questions adequately addressed those previously mentioned aspects. Interview questions were designed to uncover the perceived challenges, barriers, experiences, and supports that influence students' enrollment decisions and were created to address CRT tenets with the understanding that some questions have the potential to address several tenets simultaneously.

A criterion-based, purposeful sampling method was used for the study which included obtaining signed consent and participant assent. In qualitative research, a general guideline for sample size includes collecting extensive detail about each site or individual being studied and to explicate the particular. Each participant was able to inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). The interview process is described in greater detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Q2 Design and Rationale

Question 2 was analyzed by conducting individual, semi-structured interviews with school staff who have impact on the enrollment process for students into AP courses. I interviewed three AP teachers, three honors level course teachers, four high school counselors, and one middle school counselor. Inquiry partners were not used as interviewees in this phase. The selected teachers instruct in one of the core content areas of Math, English/Language Arts, Social Studies, or Science and possess varying levels of experience. Counselors routinely work with students at each grade level and also have varying levels of experience. A purposeful sampling method was used for these individuals. Each participant was able to inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

Proper consent forms (see Appendix B) were signed upon participation agreement. Interviews did not exceed 40 minutes.

I designed the open-ended, nondirective questions used to interview participants. Interview questions were designed to uncover the affect race may have on teachers' and counselors' beliefs and actions during the AP recruitment and enrollment processes and were created to address CRT tenets with the understanding that some questions have the potential to concurrently address several tenets. The instrument was refined through the use of pilot testing (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). A counselor and honors course teacher not a part of the selected sample group were interviewed in order to determine if questions adequately addressed the research questions and assess practitioner bias.

Using qualitative methods and employing case study research elements allowed for an effective examination of the perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of African American students and for the examination of individuals directly linked to the site's AP recruitment, recommendation, and enrollment processes. In qualitative studies, saturation is reached when introducing additional participants results in data replication or redundancy (Bowen, 2008); "the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation" (Mason, 2010, p. 2). In qualitative studies, the use of purposeful sampling and structured interviews allow for a certain level of participant homogeneity that may result in saturation being reached quickly. In this study, the chosen participant groups were asked identical, structured interview questions independent of one another. In the data analysis process, I evaluated interview data and assigned codes to this data. These codes were then categorized under appropriate themes. It was concluded that saturation was reached when, after coding interview data, no new themes emerged (Guest et al., 2006).

Q3 Design and Rationale

To address question 3, activities completed during the action research cycle were evaluated to determine effectiveness. These activities included analyzing the school's current AP recruitment and recommendation structure, reviewing student enrollment data, and collaborating with inquiry partners on activities to increase African American AP course registration. In analyzing the school's recruitment and recommendation structure, I reviewed school documents and policies related to how students gain access to AP courses. Interviews used to address inquiry questions 1 and 2 also served as data points in addressing inquiry question 3 as questions were posed to all interviewees regarding access to AP information and recruitment tactics. Policies and procedures are often established to govern how students register for classes. In some cases, pre-requisite course grades, test scores, teacher recommendations, and class limits can impact which students take AP classes. Regardless of whether the intent was to limit opportunities, it was critical to explore established AP recruitment norms to assess whether African American students received equal access to AP courses.

Context of the Study

The study took place in a high school that offers twenty-six face-to-face AP courses but had very few African American students enrolled in those courses. This high school is located in the Northeastern region of North Carolina and offers the most face-to-face AP classes in its district.

The school began operation in 1957 and was an all-White high school at that time. Although the 1954 landmark case Brown v. Board of Education deemed racially segregated public schools illegal, Black students did not attend this high school until 1964, and only two

Black students attended that school year. Full integration occurred during 1969-1970 academic year.

Approximately one hundred new students enroll into the school each year through the district's open enrollment policy and as private school students who transition to public to complete their high school curriculum. Within the school district, this school is viewed as desirable due to the amount of AP courses offered and due to the perceived rigor resulting in college preparedness that accompanies these courses. Many of the students who previously attended private schools enroll due to the abundance of these AP courses.

The school maintains a majority African American student population. The school's 1,473 total student population is disaggregated as follows: 52% African American, 37% White, 5% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. Figure 1 demonstrates the percentage of each group's AP enrollment in relation to their overall school population. Approximately 22% (317) of the student body is enrolled in at least one AP course, and slightly more than four percent of the total African American population is enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course. This data supports the exposure of inequities and enrollment disparities within this school. The focus of practice aims to rectify these disparities within a social justice context by actively researching and implementing race-conscience methods to redistribute the opportunities and advantages associated with AP access.

Inquiry Procedures

Phase One

To address inquiry question 1, data collection began prior to the administration of student interviews. In order to select student participants, the CoP utilized the school's PowerSchool database to create an excel document of the school's entire school population and current course

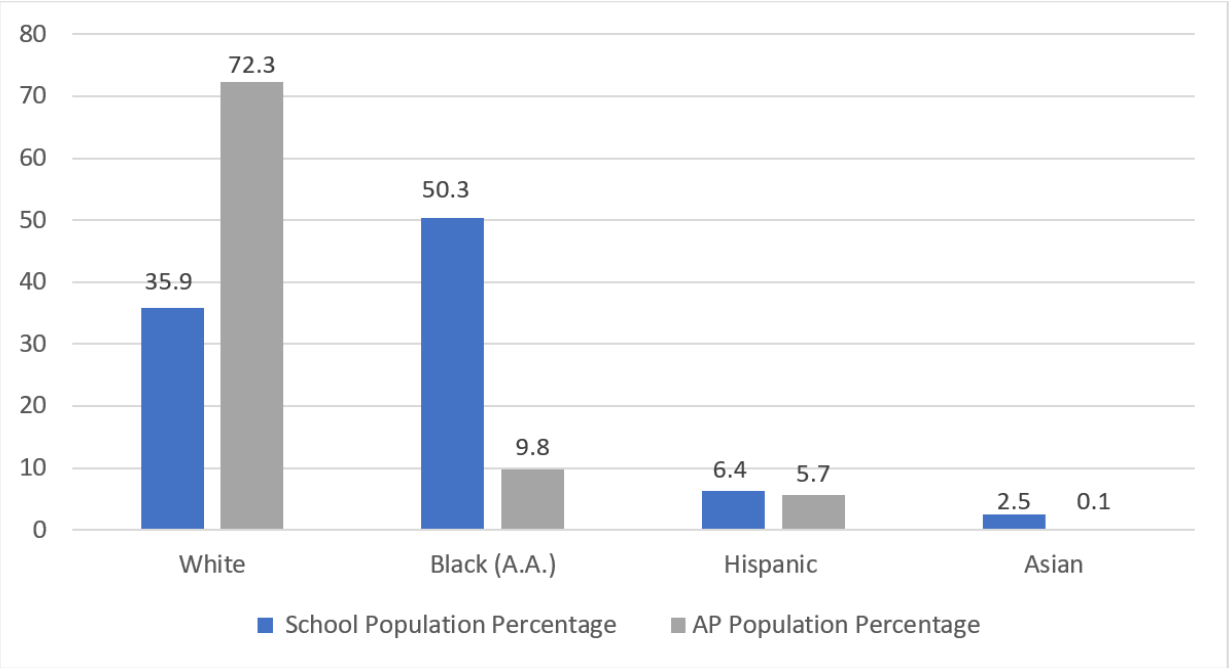


Figure 1. Subgroup comparison of school population to AP population for 2019-2020 school year.

enrollment. This report was then filtered by student race. The filter included African American students currently enrolled in AP courses and those who were not. The CoP then reviewed the GPA, honors course enrollment, and standardized test scores to assist in determining the students who were not enrolled in AP and advanced-level courses but had a likelihood of success in these types of courses. Using this data, students were placed into a "high-potential" cohort group that the CoP focused their intentional efforts on to encourage and support advanced course enrollment and success. Following this data collection, analysis, and cohort formation, I conducted ten individual interviews with African American high school students in grades 11 – 12 identified by the pre-determined criteria as having a high probability of success in an AP course; five students were enrolled in AP courses and five students were not enrolled. I attempted to interview an equal number of male and female participants and to have respondents relatively evenly distributed among grades 11-12 due to the limited number of 10th grade and lack of 9th grade African American students enrolled in an AP course at the time of the study.

Phase Two

Inquiry question 2 was first addressed by conducting separate interviews with school counselors (*4 high school and 1 middle school*) and six teachers (*3 AP teachers and 3 honors teachers*). Counselors were interviewed because of their mandatory, functional involvement in student's course enrollment process. Similarly, AP teachers and honors level teachers have an impact on AP course enrollment through their personal student recommendations and recruitment processes.

Interviews with the students and staff were recorded and transcribed immediately following each interview. To ensure internal validity, I kept journal entries detailing assumptions and biases throughout the data collection process and analysis phase. Interview transcriptions

were coded with significant themes being determined. These transcripts and emergent themes were shared with inquiry partners so that additional analysis and meaning of participants' views and perceptions could be gathered. The themes from this data were analyzed and categorized through the lens of CRT tenets.

As explained by Ladson-Billings (1998), while CRT is a powerful explanatory tool to identify problems of race, racism, and social injustice, in the realm of educational equity, CRT must be used as a framework for exposing racism and proposing solutions to address it. The interviewees' responses provided valuable information in the creation of student supports and structural improvements needed to increase African American AP enrollment. Following the interview process, I conducted a focus group with the high school staff interviewees and inquiry partners and shared summary statements of the student interviews to bring all of the perspectives together for the focus group to consider and respond to. By beginning and ending with the voices of African American students, I ensured the CRT framework informed the entire research process from start to finish.

Each participant was given an overview of the research study, purpose, and intended use of data. Teacher participants were selected based on them teaching an AP and/or honors-level core subject. All participants signed proper consent/assent forms, and students secured the consent signatures of their parents/guardians allowing them to participate in the interview and study. Individual student interviews were a maximum of 30 minutes and staff interviews were a maximum of 40 minutes. Audio recordings of the interviews were used to accurately transcribe responses, verbatim, into written transcripts.

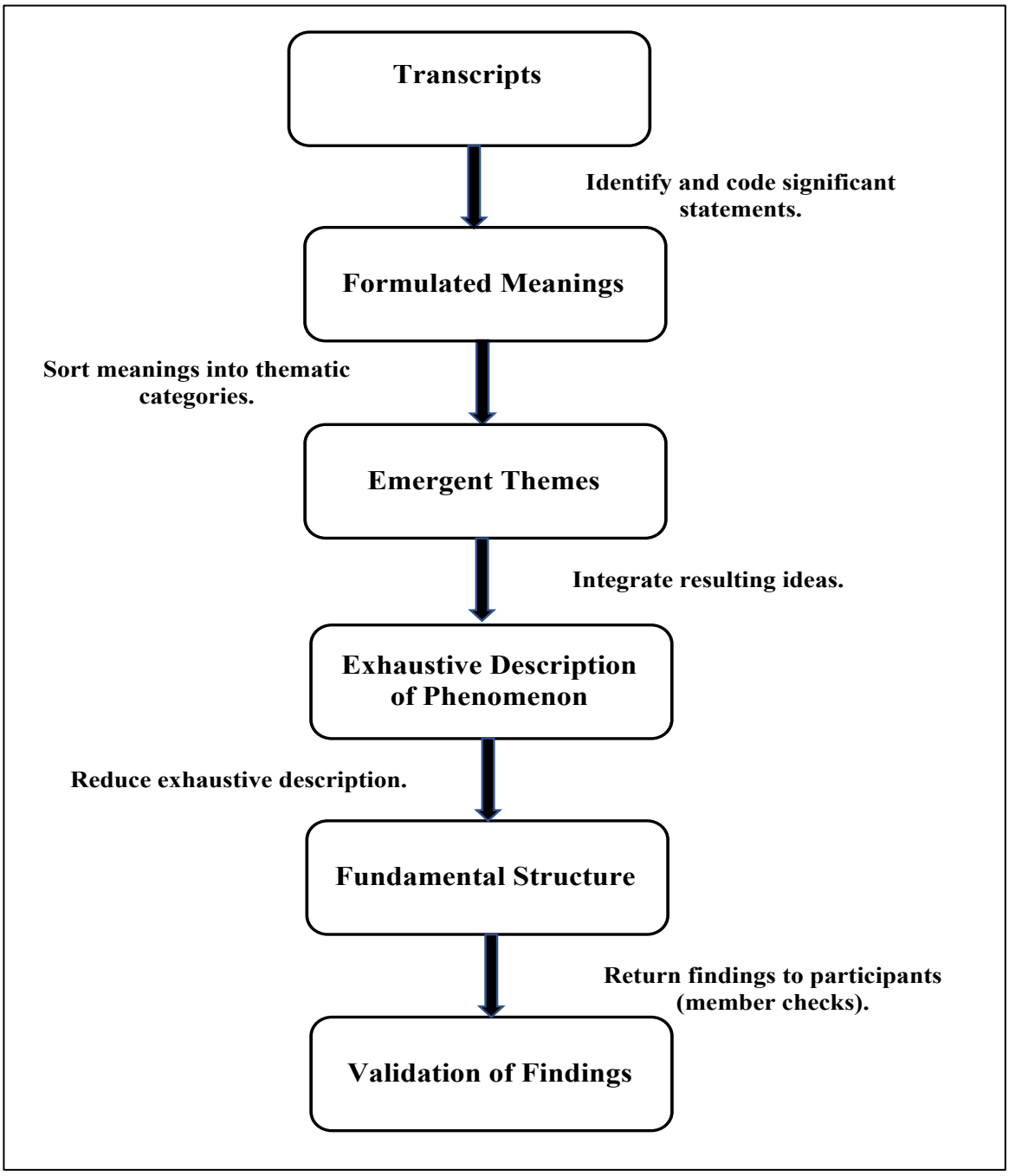
As visually presented in Figure 2, Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method was employed in analyzing participants' transcripts (Creswell, 2013; Morrow et al., 2015; Shosha,

2012). Within this phenomenological method, I utilized Saldaña's (2013) initial coding and axial coding methods to code the data.

1. After all tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, I read all transcripts multiple times in order to familiarize myself with the data and obtain a general sense of the entire content. Preliminary coding began as data was collected. During this phase, initial code ideas were formally noted (Saldaña, 2013).
2. Significant phrases and statements relating to the phenomenon under study and research questions were extracted. These statements were highlighted within transcript documents and written in separate sheets and coded.
3. Using the significant statements, meanings were formulated and grouped into thematic categories (theme clusters).
4. Through extension using axial coding (Saldaña, 2013), emergent themes were created following the use of CRT as a guide in analyzing thematic categories.
5. I validated study findings using member checking. Research findings were returned to the participants and discussed with them. Participants were allowed to compare my descriptive results with their experiences.

Phase Three

In the evaluation of inquiry question 3, data collection began prior to the administration of the interviews through document collection and the collection of current advanced course enrollment data. During this time, the CoP also focused on gathering data sources regarding the policies and procedures that were currently present in the school's overall AP recruitment and enrollment structures. Further information regarding these current structures were revealed during the student and staff interview process. The information gathered through interviews and



Note. The process of descriptive phenomenological data analysis created by Colaizzi (1978). Adapted from Shosha (2012).

Figure 2. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis process.

through documents on the recruitment/enrollment process were used by the CoP to create and implement a plan for increased African American AP enrollment in the school. This plan included altering current recruitment structures and practices and initiating a pilot, cohort program for AA students in which intentionally and specific supports were provided. Initial African American enrollment data and enrollment data following this focus of practice study were compared to assist in determining intervention effectiveness. In alignment with action research, each phase of the study remained open to collaboration with inquiry partners. As with the previous inquiry questions, an important aspect of this study was to evaluate the changes to the school's recruitment and enrollment practices within the CRT framework. This study aimed to research and address the possible endemic racism resulting in institutional barriers restricting AA access to AP courses.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was gained from the East Carolina University's IRB (see Appendix A) and the school district in which the study took place before any data were collected. The IRB guidelines and requirements ensured the protection of human participants. Students who volunteered to participate in the research study received informed consent forms to obtain signatures from their parents or guardians (see Appendix D) and minor assent forms (see Appendix C) documenting the participants' willingness to be a part of the study. Adult participants submitted consent forms (see Appendix B) as well. The consent forms explained the purpose of the study and data collection procedures in language that could be understood by individuals not conducting the research. The consent forms also notified participants that participation in the study was voluntary, participant identities are confidential, and participants could stop participating at any time without penalty. All study participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their

confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, I transcribed interview audio recordings to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The data will be kept secure in my home office for a period of no less than three years before destroying the data.

The study was conducted at the site in which I am employed as a school administrator during the time of the study. Because of this, research-based bracketing techniques were used as to not allow personal experiences to affect study results. Under this approach, I was able to describe the research phenomenon solely using the experience of the participants and perceive the gained data using an unbiased perspective (Creswell, 2013). As the practitioner and data collector, I ensured information was presented "authentically, inclusively, and transparently" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 113) regardless of how it may reflect on the research site or individual school employees of the research site.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Anney, 2014). "Credibility establishes whether or not findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views" (Anney, 2014, p. 276). To establish credibility, data triangulation, the use of multiple methods or data sources, was utilized (Merriam, 1995). Through the coding of interviews from ten students, six teachers, and five counselors, analysis of the school's recruitment and recommendation processes and structures, and analysis of previous and present enrollment data, I was able to present corroborating evidence from different sources which justified the emergent themes (Creswell, 2013).

In qualitative research, the practitioner is required to accurately include the voices of participants in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Anney, 2014). Therefore, member

checking was an additional strategy used to show credibility. Participants were provided an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview along with my analysis and interpretations so that they could judge the accuracy of data provided by them (Creswell, 2013). By offering participants this opportunity, they had the freedom to identify and correct any inaccuracies.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other settings and respondents (Merriam, 1995). It has been proposed that the transferability or generalizability of a study is determined by the consumer of the research. The possibility and/or extent of transferability is determined by the people in those situations (Merriam, 1995). Notwithstanding, purposeful sampling has been documented as acceptable transferability protocol as it provides "greater in-depth findings that other probability sampling methods" (Anney, 2014, p. 278). Participants in this study were selected based on specific criteria associated with answering the research study's questions. According to Tracy (2010), practitioners may also create reports that invite transferability by 'gathering direct testimony, providing rich description and writing accessibly and invitationally" (p. 845).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the stability of the research findings over time and over the conditions of the study; confirmability refers to the degree to which the research results could be confirmed by other practitioners (Anney, 2014). The practitioner maintained an audit trail describing, in detail, how data was collected, recorded, and analyzed throughout the study (Anney, 2014; Merriam, 1995).

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

The practitioner's role in qualitative research is to pose a question, collect and analyze data to answer the question, and present identified solutions to the question in an objective, unbiased approach (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the practitioner's role included that of an observer-as-participant, as the practitioner was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis that collected, coded, and analyzed the data from interviews to uncover the emerging concepts and patterns. Additionally, the research was employed in a position of authority as the practitioner served as a vice principal at the research site during the duration of the study. Moreover, the practitioner is as an African American who experienced the phenomenon of participating in advanced-level courses in high school with sparse minority representation. Thus, there was the potential for bias on the practitioner's part causing them to be intentional in their objectivity with their thoughts, observations, and actions. To prevent bias or preconceived notions, bracketing was invoked. Bracketing is a technique to eliminate bias and subjectivity by preventing the practitioner's personal experiences in the study; the focus remains on the participants (Creswell, 2013). The research also used member checking to verify findings and maintained an audit trail to document the interaction of the practitioner with the data through the collection and analysis process.

Summary

The qualitative, case study research design was used to conduct this study of African American high school students who qualified for participation in Advanced Placement courses and their experiences and rationale for abstaining or not abstaining from these courses. The design was also used to determine the effects of changes to the school's recruitment and recommendations practices on African American, advanced-course participation. This chapter

described the data collection process along with information on the interview instrument used in this study. After receiving approval from IRB, I collected data by conducting and recording one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with participants who met the specified criteria. Qualitative data analysis guidelines recommended by Colaizzi (1978) and Saldaña (2013) were followed. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research questions put forth in this study by providing an analysis of the amended recruitment practices and an analysis of the data to describe the experiences and rationale of African American students' decisions to participate or not to participate in Advanced Placement courses.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Disparities in African American Advanced Placement enrollment have continuously plagued the AP program. Targeted efforts have often failed to remove the elusiveness of access for these students. Studies have shown that merely increasing the number of AP course offerings does little, if anything, to decrease the enrollment disparity for African American students (Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Malkus, 2016).

The focus of practice of this qualitative, single-case study was to analyze the school's current recruitment structure for advanced-level courses and better understand factors that African American students in one North Carolina high school attributed to their lack of participation in Advanced Placement courses. These factors were examined within the context of a high school consisting of a majority African American student population with a large (26) number of available, face-to-face AP course offerings. The purpose of this study was to determine what institutional or organizational changes are needed while utilizing an action research (Coghln & Brannick, 2014) approach to improve African American enrollment in Advanced Placement courses. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research questions put forth in this study by providing an analysis of the data to describe the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students, the effect teachers and school counselors have on African American AP enrollment decisions, and the influence of institutional structures on African American AP participation. Each research question was analyzed while using Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework. Quantitative data in this chapter represents African American student, Advanced Placement enrollment progress over a three-year period while school-based recruitment initiatives were implemented. The qualitative data represented in this chapter are the findings from student interviews, teacher and counselor interviews, and a focus

group conducted by the scholarly practitioner. The following inquiry questions were addressed in this study:

- Q1. How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?
- Q2. What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?
- Q3. How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

Phase One Findings

The first action research phase gathered demographic and academic data of students enrolled at the study site. Data were filtered to include African American students enrolled in an AP course and African American students not enrolled in an AP course but have taken and been successful in honors level courses. Additional academic data gathered included AIG classification, standardized test scores, and overall GPA. The purpose of the first phase of the action research cycle was to address inquiry question 1 by conducting and analyzing data gained from semi-structured interviews with the selected sampling of African American students to determine the effects that race has on their academic and enrollment experiences and decisions.

- Q1. How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?

To test the validity of the interview instrument being administered to students, I piloted the instrument with two African American, AP students enrolled in a high school located within the study site's school district. The piloted interviews did not yield any concerns regarding the protocol format, and the provided responses were relevant to the inquiry questions the study

aimed to address. Additionally, the piloted surveys did not generate a need to revisit the literature review to address additional areas of research; therefore, I administered the interview instrument in its original form to the student participants.

During the interview process, I collected all interview data using audio recordings. The interview protocol consisted of pre-determined questions that were designed to align with at least one of the CRT tenets and provide insight into the experiences, perceptions, and decision making of qualified African American high school students both participating and not participating in the Advanced Placement Program offered in their high school. I transcribed all recordings as a supplementary measure to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Interview questions were categorized to address each of the three inquiry questions. During this phase, initial code ideas were noted, and preliminary coding began as data was collected. As the practitioner, I completed all coding and coding analysis; no data coding software was utilized. Upon completing interviews for each student participant, I repeatedly read each participant's response for each question to formally extract significant statements and create correlating codes. Each time a code appeared, I placed a tally mark in a data table to track code frequencies. The responses were analyzed for anomalies. Similar codes were clustered as overarching meanings were formulated to create thematic categories. Analysis of the thematic categories determined the emergent themes. Interview transcriptions were validated using member checking. I met with each participant to verify the accuracy and credibility of the verbatim transcription.

Participants

Student participants in this study consisted of five African American students enrolled in the school's AP program and five African American students who, based on academic data, have a high probability of AP program success but are not enrolled in the AP program. The

participants were given pseudonyms. All identifying information and transcription of the interviews are kept on a password-protected computer, which is accessible only to the practitioner. A criterion-based, purposeful sampling method was used for the study. All five AP students have taken and been successful in at least two AP classes and have a weighted GPA of 3.8 or greater. Each of the five non-AP students have enrolled in and been successful in at least six Honors level courses and have a weighted GPA of 3.1 or greater. I met with each of the ten student participants individually and invited them to take part in the interviews. No student declined participation. Parental consent and student assent forms were provided to each student and returned to the practitioner. The student participants included eight females and two males. Students ranged in age from 16 – 18, with six classified as juniors and four classified as seniors. Table 1 highlights the student participants' demographics.

Themes

The thematic analysis of ten participant interviews yielded two emergent themes comprised of four supporting categorical themes. In addressing inquiry questions and utilizing CRT as the study's conceptual framework, interview questions were framed to gather information pertaining to the ways students view themselves while also considering the ways they believe the school community views them. In addition, questions were created to identify the positive and/or negative effects of colorblind policies and practices on minority students' enrollment decisions and access to educational information. Moreover, questions sought to explain the ways race may have affected students' past educational experiences and what effect that may have on their future educational choices. Interview questions 3 - 8, 10, and 12-14 (see Appendices E and F) served the purpose of gathering phase one data to address inquiry question one. Upon transcribing and repeatedly reading and reviewing the transcripts, significant

Table 1

Student Participant Demographics

Names	Gender	Grade Point Average	Grade	AIG Identified	Number of Honors Courses Taken	Number of AP Courses Taken	Community College Courses Taken
Braelyn	Female	4.28	11	No	10	4	0
Rayna	Female	4.17	12	No	14	4	10
Paul	Male	3.89	12	Yes	15	2	2
Harper	Female	4.29	11	Yes	9	5	0
Deanna	Female	4.2	11	Yes	14	5	3
Andrea	Female	3.5	11	No	7	0	0
James	Male	3.19	11	No	11	0	0
Charity	Female	3.1	12	No	16	0	0
Brooke	Female	4.15	11	No	12	0	0
Lanay	Female	3.57	12	No	17	0	2

statements were identified. After several rounds of identify and coding significant statements, these codes were clustered and used to formulate broader supporting categorical themes. Through these formulated meanings, the two central themes emerged. Each emergent theme directly addressed how the academic and enrollment experiences of these African American students have been affected by their perception of race.

Significant statements were selected and integrated into the findings in order to provide an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Within each section, significant statements were selected and analyzed in text based on the potential contribution to the emergent themes as interpreted by the practitioner. Not every participant was fully representative of each categorical theme. Some participants were more prominent than others in the final analysis of themes.

The following sections provide evidence of the two themes that emerged through the analysis and Saldaña (2013) coding process. First, I examined the deficit-oriented characterizations students placed on themselves when speaking about their enrollment and academic experiences. Secondly, statements revealed the effects that perceived marginalization has had on many of the students. Table 2 outlines emergent themes, supporting categorical themes, and coded responses.

Deficit-Oriented Characterizations

The first theme that emerged from the data indicated that all student participants attributed a deficit-based ideology towards themselves in some manner. As shown in table 2, when describing their academic and enrollment experiences, students felt disadvantaged when discussing their capabilities, family support, and support from teachers. This coded data is further explored in the following sections.

Table 2

Summary of Inquiry Question #1 Themes

Emergent Themes	Thematic Categories	Coded Responses
Deficit-Oriented Characterizations: Black students view themselves as operating within a deficit both internally and externally.	Self-Inadequacy	Lack of Confidence (4) White Equated Positivity (10) Financial Stability (3)
	Inadequate Parental Support	Lack of Encouragement (6) Lack of AP Knowledge (9)
Marginalization: Black students feel unimportant and powerless within the *advanced-level* classroom community.	Lack of Community	Isolation (10) Lack of Information Distribution (9)
	Non-Positive Viewpoints	Negative View of Students (6) Negative View of Teachers (5)

Self-Inadequacy. The first supporting category that emerged for this theme indicated some students deemed their abilities insufficient to succeed in an AP course. When asked why they believe there are so few African American students in AP courses, Harper, Andrea, Brooke, and Lanay described having a lack of confidence when responding to the interview question. Andrea responded, "Some students may think they just can't simply do it or think they're not smart enough." Harper responded, "Some people don't think they can do it, and that's bad because they probably can. Some people don't have enough confidence…People have a bad misconception of what an AP class is." Brooke replied, "Sometimes I feel like I can't do it. Some people don't want to do all the work that AP teachers probably give them. They don't think they're capable of doing it." Similarly, Lanay stated, "It might be a confidence thing. People don't really tell them they can do it, or they just assume they can't."

Participants Andrea, Brooke, and Lanay have never enrolled in an AP course. Interestingly, Brooke and Lanay have taken the largest number of honors courses within the non-AP student sample group; twelve and seventeen, respectively. Despite their successful completion of numerous honors level courses, these students continued to doubt their ability to achieve in AP classes. As a result, students sometimes choose to engage in lower-level courses due to concern about their competence level and fear of not performing well in more advanced classes (Tyson, 2011).

Similar to a Ford et al. (2008) study, each participant attributed positive characteristics toward their peers in AP courses, which host a majority White population. When asked to describe the type of student most likely to take an AP course in their school, descriptors included White, smart and hardworking, financially stable, and having college aspirations. Paul, Harper, Andrea, Charity, and Brooke all described the typical AP student as being White. In addition to

most likely being a White student, Paul elaborated to add that the typical AP student is, "Smart and hardworking because, in order to get A's or B's, you can't do the bare minimum." Brooke included the extracurricular aspect that AP students are, "Usually White, smart, and people who are in lots of clubs." Braelyn and James described these students as having higher education aspirations and wanting to impress colleges and universities. Rayna, Charity, and Lanay described a financial component attributed to White students in AP courses. Charity replied,

> A White person with a wealthy background. That's really what I only see. Being in a class with them and hearing them talk. I had a one-on-one experience talking to one of them, and he would tell me all the stuff they do, their lives, things like that. He was telling me who was the richest one, telling me about their parents, all those things. He's friends with them. They all come from the same…

Rayna stated, "The kids that have a good financial background. If they have a good home life and good financial stability, those are the kids that will probably be in those classes." Lanay expressed,

> I feel like more White kids have more tutoring opportunities and just more opportunities to be in those classes. They get a lot of tutoring. So, if they do struggle in an AP class, they get tutoring. I feel like a lot of Black families don't get that. They [White students] have friends or their families hire people.

In a report published by Darity et al. (2018), in every level of educational attainment, the median wealth among Black families is substantially lower than White families. Hence, it stands to reason that Black students enrolled in the school may view their White counterparts as being more financially stable than themselves; this was seen as an advantage held by White students. Consequently, while financial stability was not a strong coded response in terms of frequency,

this code was included as it was an area in which some Black students deemed themselves as operating within a deficit.

Inadequate Parental Support. Non-AP student participants overwhelmingly reported minimal parental guidance during their course registration process. Four participants, all AP students, spoke of receiving direct influence from their parent(s) on which courses to register for. When questioned about guidance from family members, Harper replied, "Usually, I talk to my parents…Usually I do it with my mom or my dad, and I look at what I've done before and what I need to do at that point." Rayna acknowledged, "I have this realization that this has been happening since elementary school. My mom has been pushing me ever since then. She says, *you need to do this*…because she wanted something better for me than what she had." Simultaneously, this student stated, "Some parents are not like, *yeah you can do this*. They're just like, *do whatever you want; It's ok*…They do not really care about the grade aspect." Deanna explained that her mother has always been a part of her registration process and was even present during a Zoom meeting with her counselor when deciding what classes to take. Paul explained, "It is mostly from my mom because she is [works] in the [school] system. So, she talked to most of the teachers."

The remaining participants provided similar responses regarding their autonomy during course registration when explaining that their parents trust them to take what they need in order to continue progressing properly. Charity stated,

> I would sit down an tell my mom about the classes I picked, but it was never like, *oh you should take an AP class.* It was not a big push…I'm not saying she didn't care, but me in high school versus her in high school was a really big difference…For her, it's a really big push to make sure we do really good in these classes. Not that she didn't think we

could do it because she sees me and my sister doing it. She wasn't pushing us to do anything more than passing classes and making sure our behavior was straight.

Charity also recounted asking her mother to sign a waiver so that she could take an honors course. "It was never my mom telling me to take the honors course. It was me going to her like, *I want to take this honors course. Can you sign the paper because I wasn't recommended for it?"* Only Paul stated that his parent had ever received information about AP courses. As he previously described, he believed this was due to his parent's occupation within the school district. The remaining participants stated their parents were unaware of information regarding AP courses. Rayna replied, "We knew [AP courses] they existed; We just didn't know anything else." Likewise, Braelyn stated, "I mainly have to describe it [AP classes] to them."

Marginalization

A second theme to emerge when reviewing data pertaining to research question one was that many students expressed feelings of marginalization. These students described feelings of isolation, being overlooked or ignored, not being given information about higher level courses, and/or general feelings of not belonging when speaking about their experiences in honors and AP classrooms. These feelings of marginalization were deemed as coming from both teachers and students in these classrooms.

Lack of Community. When describing their academic and social experiences in their advanced-level courses, in various manners, each student expressed there being a lack of community in these environments. Students routinely feared the feelings of alienation as being one of the few or only African American in the classroom (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). They all have had to find ways to adapt in order to navigate their feelings of isolation within these courses. In some instances, these feelings have led students to not fully pursue the

advanced-level courses offered to them in their school and/or not fully engage when enrolled in advanced-level courses. When describing her AP experience, Braelyn dismally explained,

> When taking an AP course, the ones I've been in, all of them [White students] have been friends. All of them know each other's parents and things like that. When you come in, you don't have a community there. For me, it's only two or three students that are African American…That brings a sort of isolation. That's why I feel a lot of African American students are not really taking AP or honors level courses. For my social experiences, due to most of them knowing each other already, I have to find two or three people that I'm ok talking to. Then I create friendships that way.

I asked if that is something she has to do with each new AP course (creating new friendships)? Braelyn replied, "I have to make those connections over again." Rayna said, "Educationally, I'm fine. Socially, I think two of my AP classes, I did not have friends in. I just sat by myself and did my work." Paul expressed his inability to speak freely when he is the only or one of a few Black students in class. His feelings of isolation stifled his willingness to contribute to class discussions. Deanna stated, "Socially, I've gotten used to it at this point, being one of the only few Black kids in a class." Andrea expressed similar sentiments. "Academically, I usually do well…I really just do the work and kind of tend not to talk…I just kind of sit there and keep to myself." Lanay described only regularly interacting with Black students that they are familiar with in their honors courses. Charity explained,

> Sometimes, it's only you. I was lucky enough, in my honors classes, to be put in with a couple of Black students I knew. But it could be only you, and you're going to know it's only you. Group projects, you don't have anyone to work with. It's uncomfortable when the teachers make everyone get grouped together on their own because now it's like, *Well*

who am I supposed to work with? I don't know anybody. They're not open to talk to me. If I'm open to talk to them, you're still ignored. They make you feel like you're not as smart as them. Nine times out of ten, you're smarter than these kids. There was one time I was giving a girl the answer to a worksheet we were doing; it was a group project. She went back and asked the teacher. When it was her friends giving it to her, she wrote the answer down, then moved on to the next question. But when I had the answer, it was like, *forget what you're saying*.

Interestingly, Charity also described behavioral changes she feels she has to make while in honors courses.

I'm not very social, but when I get into a class where I know I'm going to feel like the outcast, I try to socialize more. So, some were welcoming to me. I guess you could say I have a funny personality in these classes. I don't like saying it, but you kind of feel like you have to be a clown in these classes if you want anyone to socialize with you because now, you're the funny Black kid…It was like I had to do more than just have a normal conversation.

No students explained any ways in which their classroom environments were altered by students or teachers in ways to make the environment feel more inclusive. In fact, of the five non-AP students, three expressed how their experiences in honors classes negatively affected their decision to enroll in an AP course. James enrolled in more standard-level courses for his 11th and 12th grade years in order to have classes with peers of his racial group and feel more comfortable in his academic setting.

...in most of the honors classes I've had, I've rarely even had one friend in the class. So, this year, I switched more to lower-level classes like English 4. I did honors Math, but

> still, I barely had any people to talk with in there. In standard English 3, I had friends in there, and we did a lot of work together.

When explaining their decision to not enroll in AP courses, Charity replied,

> I knew that if I've got three or four Black people in this class, that's the only group I feel comfortable with in these classes, and I know they aren't going in AP classes. They're strictly sticking to honors classes. It was like, if I get into this AP class, I know I'm going to be the only person. Only me in there.

For some students, experiences in advanced classes may provide a higher level of academic confidence causing them to believe they will be successful in an AP environment. For these students, their desire to achieve may outweigh their need for social comfort (Tyson, 2011). Of the five AP-students, Braelyn and Harper described how their success in honors courses provided the confidence needed to progress into AP courses. Braelyn stated,

> My experiences in my honors classes have positively affected my experiences in AP courses because knowing that I have what it takes to get to the next step is a sense of fulfillment and encouragement. To show that I can do this, I can expand more; I can try more and think more critically. I think that's what has been pushing me to go to AP courses.

Harper stated,

> My freshman year, I was nervous about taking AP courses, so I took honors courses instead. I felt like, if I can take these honors courses and do fine, I feel like I'm able and more prepared for AP classes.

Rayna and Deanna explained their entry into AP courses as a sort of natural progression based on their academic trajectory. Deanna also expressed a sense of pride in informing others that they are enrolled in AP classes.

> I know I couldn't, especially since I started off with some honors, I knew I couldn't just take honors forever. I knew that AP looks better. I would need to take them anyway, not necessarily for an AP credit…For me personally, I feel better saying, *I take AP this or AP that.*

I asked a follow up question inquiring why she felt better informing people she is in an AP course. Deanna responded,

> I don't know. It's just like some people are shocked. I don't brag about it…People ask, *What class are you going to?* I'm like, I'm going to 4th period. I'm taking [course] with [teacher]. They're like, *Oh, is it AP?(In a surprised tone.)* I'm like, *Yeah, it's AP.* I feel like the kids in it [AP] feel like they're better than everybody else.

When asked about what effect a more balanced AP/Honors enrollment would have on themselves and the school, the common language of togetherness and/or comfortability was used by nine of the student participants. Braelyn expressed,

> I think, for me as a student, that's just a great idea because it makes you feel like *we're in this together*. Even though you know that you're all in a class together, but it's that sense of community that you feel. Also, teachers could see more Black students and have an understanding of like, *we can relate in a better way than what I have been doing.*

Rayna responded,

> …I think it would be a lot more fun for each side…I've seen classes where it's divided. You can see a good division, and hopefully, the teacher would try to incorporate activities where it's not just like White people-White people, Black people-Black-people.

Paul stated,

> It would make the Black side more comfortable because you see more of yourself in there. Say you had to do a group project, not saying you only have to work with a Black kid, but you will have someone to work with. So, you won't feel…left out. The way the classes are today, you might get looked at differently because you never know how some of them look at you.

Brooke communicated, "I feel like it would be more participation because usually…there are more White people speaking. I feel like Black people would feel more comfortable speaking and asking questions."

An additional area in which student interview data revealed evidence of marginalization was in their community's lack of knowledge acquisition surrounding AP courses. When asked if they or their parent had ever received information about AP courses, only one student (Paul) stated they or their parent have ever received information about AP courses. This participant's parent is employed by the school district. When asked about criteria needed to enroll in AP courses and possible benefits of enrolling in an AP course, participants lacked detailed knowledge of AP courses and had limited understanding of the advantages of participating in AP classes.

Braelyn described not fully understanding the expectations of AP courses. "I knew that I needed to take some classes, but I didn't know the requirements I would have to do while being

in that class. Like how much of a heavy workload it would be." Rayna stated, "For AP courses, you need to pick up fast, and you need to have good reading, writing, and comprehension." The student also communicated they did not know the extent of these skills that they would need until after enrolling in the course. Paul replied, "I knew that it was going to be harder but not this much harder." While this was not a part of the interview protocol, only one student, Charity, communicated knowledge of the school's waiver process. However, they learned of this process when in 8th grade while registering for 9th grade courses. When asked if anyone at the high school level ever communicated this waiver process, the student replied, no.

Only two participant students were able to provide definitive answers regarding the possible benefits of AP courses such as increased points towards your GPA or college credit if appropriate exam scores are obtained. When asked if they believed there were any benefits to enrolling in AP courses, Rayna stated, "No. I wish I didn't take AP courses because if you don't pass the exam, it doesn't mean anything. You just get a good GPA boost. I wish I took more [community college] classes than AP classes." Deanna stated,

> I feel it makes you look more competitive, and then for the knowledge, yes. You could also do [community college] classes too. I can't say, *oh, they're easy. It will boost your GPA* because you have to…it's worth it; the work you have to do for the type of score that they give you. You can have the possibility of, if you score a certain way, exempt it when you go to college.

Braelyn spoke about a course delving deeper into her personal interests. For this particular class, the course content helped lessen the adverse effects of the actual course composition.

> For me, taking APUSH as an African American student, I really enjoy learning about African American history from a different perspective than what I usually learn. In other

American History classes, it was very limited. With APUSH, I got to learn a lot more about my history.

Harper responded, “Doesn’t it count for more credits? I would say the main benefit is that it counts for more credits, and it looks better on your transcript. I don’t really know much about it.” Paul stated, “It challenges you harder than regular, standard classes. It moves a lot quicker, so it helps you manage your time better.” Andrea had very limited knowledge of AP benefits. “From what I think an AP class is, isn’t it like a college class or trying to get you ready for college or something like that? Similarly, Charity stated, “I feel like you get to knock these college classes out of the way before you get to college. So, I think that’s the main benefit.” Lanay replied, “If you do good, it counts for your college credits. Other than that, I don’t really think so.” James expressed looking good for colleges while Brooke replied, “It will help you get through college…It would help you get more scholarships and stuff. That’s how I feel.” Ultimately, AP courses have the possibility of providing several benefits for any student who participates in them. However, as demonstrated in interview responses, many of these benefits are unknown to the African American students within the study context.

Non-Positive Viewpoints. Participants were asked to describe how they believe their honors and/or AP teachers view African American students and, conversely, what views they hold towards these teachers. While no students described teachers as displaying extremely discriminatory or malicious tendencies, the *comprehensive* student responses to these questions were not flattering towards teachers. Responses from six students ranged from students believing teachers show favoritism towards White students, teachers lacking in the amount of support given to Black students, and Black students being charged with representing or speaking for all Black students in the school. The remaining four students believed teachers were unbiased or

they felt they were unable to answer the question based on their limited knowledge of the teachers.

Braelyn stated,

> I think they don't view or associate Black students in a bad way, but I do think they favor some students who are Caucasian more. It may just be the community itself because if you have a lot of students that a teacher likes and they are in a certain community, then maybe they just feel like they like that community more. It's not that any teacher has shown me ill will, I just felt like I've seen them favor Caucasian students more than Black students.

Rayna replied, "Depends on the teacher. Some teachers want them to succeed. I've seen that teachers want them to grow, and they'll help them…Some teachers will just ignore [Black students] them." Rayna articulated,

> Sometimes, I feel like some of my teachers view me by my race or they just see me as another student. It's very common in English classes when you have to debate. Why do I have to defend my rights to people? That happens quite a bit in some of my English classes, and it just makes me very uncomfortable because I'm usually one of the three Black people in there. We're having this discussion about racism. Why do I have to do this? I don't want to do this or have these discussions in front of people who don't get it as much as I do. It's very awkward for those classes.

James responded, "I think they view us as having equal opportunity, but they don't see us as pushing hard enough." Charity stated,

> Aside from having a group of African American students in their classroom, if they're looking just in the halls or in the commons and stuff, it's like you get the noisy Black

> students. You get the misbehaved ones. Not saying White kids aren't, but you know. Then it's kind of like, *well I don't have to deal with that in my classroom*, or *they're not as smart as these White kids I've been teaching…*And then when you get them in your classroom, now they're viewing us as quiet. Like we're not talkative; we don't know anything because we really have no one to talk to. We have nothing to say in these classrooms…you're ignored in the class…You're not hearing many good things about a Black student if they're not in your class. So, when you do hear stuff, it's negative because it's like a fight or something. So, you get a negative view of them, which I don't feel is fair.

Lanay stated,

> I feel some teachers might think they're [Black students] lucky to be in the class. There are certain Black people that are just really smart, and those are the ones that take AP classes. An average Black student, they [teachers] wouldn't be surprised if they weren't in the class.

I asked the clarifying question, "So if a Black student is in the [AP] class, [teachers] they think the student is the top of the top [academically]? Lanay replied, "Yes." I asked, "Do you feel all the White students in the classes are the smartest of the White students? She responded, "No. I think it makes more sense to them [teachers] to have more White kids than Black kids in there." Paul, Deanna, and Andrea all expressed feelings that, of the teachers they know, these teachers are un-biased towards African American students.

Student responses were similar when asked of how they [student] view the AP instructors in the school. However, AP-student participants Rayna, Paul, and Deanna specifically mentioned appreciating teachers whom they feel are supportive. Supportive teachers can have a substantial

positive affect on the academic outcomes for minority students (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Rayna stated,

> Some of them, I really love. They're really nice; they're caring…Some teachers will just talk, not call on you. One teacher, she'll call on me in a minute. Even if I don't want to answer. She was like, *I don't care. You know this answer.* She'll look me dead in the face until I answer the question. I can't say the same for others.

I asked Rayna if she felt as if the teacher(s) was specifically not calling on her. She replied,

> They're specifically not calling on me. I've been like the only Black kid in class, and everybody can not raise their hand, or they have specific people in mind that they will call on, or they'll ask to come help…I'm just like sitting there. I'm just like, *I'll help. I'm a pretty good student.*

Paul elaborated on certain AP teachers understanding and allowing grace periods when students participate in extracurricular activities.

> [Teacher A] is really good because he's understanding. Say you had a game, and you come back late and you're like, *I didn't have enough time because we got back at 12:00am.* [Teacher A] would say, *ok, just turn it in tomorrow.* [Teacher B] is the same way.

Deanna spoke about a teacher they had the previous semester.

> He just had a good energy and was willing to talk to anybody. I feel like if I had a problem that wasn't even dealing with school, I could go to him, and it would be fine. As far as teaching, you can tell he really loves his job and what he teaches. So, his class was so fun.

Summary

In summary, the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students have been affected by their perception of race. Common themes that emerged from the student interview data included deficit-oriented characterizations and feelings of marginalization within advanced-level classrooms. While some students choose to persevere and enroll in AP classes, for others, race has been a contributing factor in their decision not to enroll in these classes.

Phase Two Findings

The second action research phase addressed inquiry questions two.

- Q2. What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?

I conducted semi-structured interviews with school personnel (teachers and counselors) to determine the affect these professionals have on AP enrollment decisions of African American students. Relevant student responses from the student interview protocol are included where applicable to thoroughly address this inquiry question. During this phase, I also facilitated a focus group allowing for the staff participants' acquisition of knowledge, from the students' perspectives, related to staff effect on student enrollment decisions. To test the validity of the interview instrument, I piloted the interview protocols with a high school teacher and counselor who did not take part in the study. The piloted interviews did not yield any concerns regarding the protocol format, and the provided responses were relevant to the inquiry questions the study aimed to address. Additionally, the piloted interviews did not generate a need to revisit the literature review to address additional areas of research; therefore, I administered the interview instrument in its original form.

In alignment with phase one procedures, audio recordings were used to collect school personnel interview data. The interview protocol consisted of pre-determined questions assorted to provide discussion on each inquiry question while aligning with at least one of the CRT tenets. Questions were designed to provide insight into school personnel perceptions of African American students and what ways they facilitate and/or hinder African American students' enrollment into AP courses. I transcribed all recordings to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Interview transcriptions were validated using member checking. During this phase, coding procedures were identical to the procedures described in phase one.

Participants

School personnel participants in this study consisted of four high school counselors, one middle school counselor, three AP teachers, and three honors course teachers. The participants were given pseudonyms. All identifying information and transcription of the interviews are kept on a password-protected computer, which is accessible only by the practitioner. I met with each of the eleven adult participants individually and invited them to take part in the interviews. Consent forms were provided and signed by each participant. Table 3 highlights the school personnel participants' demographics.

Themes

The thematic analysis of the participant interviews yielded two emergent themes. These aggregate themes were constructed using supporting, thematic categories. Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendices G and H) were utilized to aid in gathering phase two data to address inquiry question two. Upon transcribing and repeatedly reading and reviewing the transcripts, significant statements were identified. Significant statements were then coded and used to formulate broader supporting categorical themes. Through these formulated meanings,

Table 3

School Personnel Participant Demographics

Name	Position	Race	Years of Experience	Level/Subject Area
Mr. Hall	Teacher	White	12	AP Science
Ms. Stroud	Teacher	White	20	AP Social Studies
Ms. East	Teacher	White	15	AP Mathematics
Ms. Alvarez	Teacher	Hispanic	13	English Language Arts
Ms. Lewis	Teacher	White	16	Social Studies
Ms. Adams	Teacher	White	3	English Language Arts
Ms. Kelly	Counselor	African American	26	High School
Ms. Woods	Counselor	African American	15	High School
Ms. Brown	Counselor	African American	29	High School
Ms. Gray	Counselor	White	9	High School
Ms. Cox	Counselor	White	10	Middle School

the two central themes emerged. Each emergent theme directly addressed the effect teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students.

Significant statements were selected and integrated into the findings in order to provide an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Within each section, significant statements were selected and analyzed in text based on the potential contribution to the emergent themes as interpreted by the practitioner.

The following emergent themes were constructed using interview data: varying levels of influence and varying enrollment solicitation methods. Table 4 outlines the two emergent themes, categorical themes, and coded responses.

Varying Levels of Influence

The first theme to emerge from this phase of data analysis was the conclusion that staff members attributed the likelihood of African American students enrolling into AP courses to several layers of influences. These layers were categorized into the supporting areas of family, peer, and teacher. Congruent with phase one findings which illuminated the students' perspectives, school staff articulated ways in which family support, a lack of community, and teachers' actions can affect students' enrollment decisions. Teacher protocol questions 5, 7, and 8 (see Appendix G), and counselor protocol questions 3 and 5 (see Appendix H) pertained to this area of analysis.

Family Influence. School personnel vocalized the impact that a student's family, often in a deficit manner, has on enrollment decisions. Mr. Hall, Ms. Stroud, and Ms. Lewis briefly mentioned family support when addressing these questions. Ms. Lewis stated, "…depending on their home situation, what their family support looks like. Are they being encouraged to try this?" Teachers Alvarez, Adams, and Kelly along with counselors Brown and Gray alluded to the

Table 4

Summary of Inquiry Question #2 Themes

Emergent Themes	Categories	Coded Responses
Varying Levels of Influence: School staff assert that a student's family, peer group, and teachers have certain degrees of influence on their enrollment decisions.	Family	Support/Encouragement (7) Lack of AP Knowledge (4)
	Peer	Intrinsic Motivation (3) Lack of Community (6)
	Teacher	Recommendations/Encouragement (7) Building Relationships (3)
Varying Enrollment Solicitation: Recruitment into AP courses is conducted both individually and through school-sponsored events.	Individual Practices	Recommendations/Supports (10)
	Institutional Practices	School Events (10) Lack of Diversity (5) Culture of Privilege (10)

parents' understanding of and knowledge of AP courses being a contributing factor. Ms. Alvarez replied, "I think the parents would encourage the kids to take it…,but I just don't think they understand." Ms. Adams answered,

> I think big parts of it are the family's investment in education or knowledge of how honors vs standards and college prep type of stuff works. For example, in my honors course, one of my lowest students is a Black boy and his mother works with [school system], and I think a big part of his being on the honors track is because his mother encourages him and pushes him…I have some that would be absolutely capable of doing AP, but I don't know if they have the resources and accessibility to accomplish that because so much of AP work does depend on what you do outside of the class as well.

Counselor Kelly replied,

> …if you don't have the parents' backing or have an understanding of what AP is, why they should do it, why it's more challenging and rigorous than just an honors course or a standard course, then you don't really have the support that you need as a counselor or a teacher…When I look at the students who are taking AP courses, these are students from more affluent families, they understand what AP courses are, they understand how they affect the student's GPA, and they come in with the mindset that *I want to have a certain GPA to go to a certain college because I know that's what they're looking for.*

Counselor Brown responded, "I feel like the teacher is first, and then the parent…is going to also have to encourage…because some kids that can do it don't have the support at home, or their parents don't know anything about it." Counselor Gray stated,

> I think a lot of times some of those families don't know as much about the AP program. They're not as familiar. They haven't had a neighbor or a friend that's a part of it, and so from there, they don't always push or know to push their student towards it.

Peer Influence. The effects of peers and students lacking their community in these courses was an additional supporting theme to emerge. Mr. Hall and Counselors Kelly and Gray alluded to a student's personal motivation being a factor of influence by making the statements, "It comes down to the student" and "They have to want to do it." Just as the students articulated, school personnel participants (five teachers and two counselors) also provided answers which attributed a lack of community affecting student enrollment decisions. Mr. Hall explained,

> I've had a few students that I was recommending for honors, and they straight up told me that they weren't going to take an honors class because they didn't like the people that were in there, and they would be judged for taking it. Their friend group would see them differently.

Ms. Stroud stated,

> …there are a number of African American students that take AP classes at this school and are successful but still feel, somewhat, isolated from their peers in the class. Still don't feel like they're a part of it, they're let in…several have been honest and said, *when we walk into that all White classroom…it's going to be awkward…*I can't pretend to understand what they're dealing with, but I know it's true. It doesn't mean these kids should be denied the opportunities that other kids are having.

Ms. East described a previous conversation with a student.

> The work is easy, and I like that I'm getting an A…but for an hour and a half, I don't have anything to talk to them about. It's just weird. I just feel like I'm the only one in there. It just broke my [teacher] heart.

Ms. Alvarez stated, "The kids don't see themselves in that class. The teachers are not that color. The majority of the students in those classes, they don't see themselves represented there. There is discomfort…They're outsiders to that group."

Teacher Influence. School staff were able to recognize the influence they may have on student enrollment decisions. Common language used during responses included recommendations and building relationships. Ms. Lewis stated, "Recommendations are a big part and talking to the student before you just recommend them. Encourage them…I think it's all about how you talk to your students and how you support them." Ms. East focused on the presence of trust and building relationships. "I think it's that trust and that relationship and that they know you're going to guide and help do what's best for them. It's all about relationships." Ms. Adams elaborated on a conversation she had with one of her classes during the most recent registration process.

> Many students in that section [standard class] I've talked to about moving up to honors, and that class is almost completely Black. Some of the kids that I've talked to about honors have never even thought about honors before. I remember yesterday, I was talking to one kid about it, and he was like, *I don't even really know what goes on in an honors class.*

Counselors Kelly, Brown, and Gray spoke on the importance of teacher recommendations and/or teacher encouragement. Ms. Brown stated, "I think the teacher has the greatest influence. The teacher needs to encourage…I think teachers can be the bigger influence by encouraging

that student to take those classes." Ms. Kelly also provided the belief that teachers play a pivotal role.

> The conversation needs to be had between the student and the teacher. As counselors, we can see their grades overall, but we don't teach them. We don't know their academic prowess, where they are in class, how much they are engaged. We see the end result, but we don't know their work ethic and things like that…They [teachers] need to have those conversations…I think there are some teachers that do, but I don't know, across the board, that all of them are doing that.

Ms. Gray communicated,

> From the counseling side, we do turn to the teacher to look at the recommendations they've made based on having the student in their classroom for a semester…if the students don't have that recommendation or that push, then they go to their safe area.

Teachers Hall and Stroud spoke about ways teachers may negatively influence enrollment decisions. Mr. Hall explained,

> I think they [staff] definitely influence it. You have certain social circles, I feel like…And I'm not thinking about any teachers in particular, but I feel like there is kind of like an "in crowd" at [school name]. I think that in crowd doesn't openly block people from joining, but I think there are social pressures like, *that kid shouldn't take this class.* I don't know if the teachers are involved…I think there are roadblocks for certain students to get into AP. I don't think anybody is intentionally trying to put up those roadblocks, but I think that they've just been there for a long time.

Ms. Stroud elaborated on ways that teachers may be roadblocks to AP access.

> I think, positively, they [staff] can influence by having these same conversations, by making an effort to reach out, by making their class engaging…But I also think teachers can, and do, negatively influence as well. By the messages we send, sometimes indirectly…I think we do sometimes send messages with putting so much emphasis on a single test, not growth. Not showing that we want to help that student grow or that we want that student to be included. I think we send some messages, whether we know we do or not. In the way we grade, in the way we talk to students, in the way we handle mistakes. I think sometimes we may verbally say, *we want you here*, but through our actions and behaviors, we may send a different message to students.

Two teachers spoke on the ways they have altered their classroom and/or instructional practices to provide greater inclusivity. Ms. Adams stated,

> I think that I make a big effort in keeping it equitable in terms of assignments and trying to keep in those intersections of marginalization…when I'm thinking about my assignments, I'm trying to, as much as possible, center each individual student, and I think that's made a huge effort toward the equitability of my assignments.

Ms. Stroud described,

> I began to do research and learned that African American students, in general, typically thrive in a more collaborative rather than competitive classroom. So that sort of changed the way I structured a lot of things…I think that has made a little difference in helping all students feel more comfortable in the class…

Ms. Stroud also described norms she instructs groups to carry out before beginning to work on collaborative projects.

> When you get in a group the first thing we do is, we say hello and we introduce names…Even if somebody is your best buddy you've known since 3rd grade, they're going to say their name because there might be somebody in your group that you don't know. You would think sometimes with juniors and seniors you don't have to teach some of the common curtesy things, but you still have to remind them, and make sure nobody gets left out.

Varying Enrollment Solicitation

An additional theme to emerge entailed the various methods school staff participants described utilizing to solicit enrollment into AP courses. Teacher protocol questions 3, 4, 9-13, 16, 17, and 19 (see Appendix G) and counselor protocol questions 6-9,12, 13, and 15 (see Appendix H) provided the data allowing this theme to emerge during the coding process. The following excerpts will shed light on methods used on both individual and institutional levels within the school setting.

Individual Practices. Each counselor and teacher provided examples of ways they, individually, encourage African American students to enroll in AP classes. The main avenues communicated involved individual course recommendations and providing support measures.

Counselors communicated that they view students' previous grades and often base their guidance relative to the students' long-term goals (i.e., university, community college, etc.). Counselor Kelly stated, "I looked at the student overall. I looked at, not just if they were identified as AIG, but that helps…the criteria to get that identification, I think can be skewed…" This counselor also elaborated on the information she provides regarding course rigor and time commitment. "When you have your counterparts spending two to three hours in that one particular course, the willingness to do this has to be there…for the ones I recommend, maybe

10% will try it." Counselor Cox stated, "I try to push them, but I don't want to kick them too hard…I look at their grades, their demeanor. If I can talk to them, you know…That all factors in, but mostly, their grades." Counselor Brown describes that she tries "to help them understand why they need to take more challenging classes." Similarly, Counselor Gray explained,

> I try to let them know what their options are and promote it and really talk it up to them if it's something they should be looking into…Some are excited about the opportunity, but some still come back to hesitation…I think sometimes they think we don't see the differences in the program and that we wouldn't understand.

When describing encouraging and recommending AA students for AP courses, Mr. Hall stated,

> …Their work ethic and overall intelligence level. You can tell when you've got a really smart student, and I've had lots. I've tried to encourage them. At least if not AP, at least the honors level classes...For [AP course], word-of-mouth. So, I talk to the students that are in my AP class, and they tell their friends that think they want to take the course. They get a good number that way.

Ms. Stroud stated,

> Generally, the first response is, *do you really think I can do it?*...Normally, I'm trying to recommend them for a class with me. Not because I'm trying to pump up my own numbers or anything, but because I know I can take care of them. I don't want to put them in class with a teacher that I don't know well or that I have concerns might not support them…I would say at least half of the students I have personally taught and talked to will end up doing it. The other students in the school that I haven't taught, that I just have short little conversations with, I'd say a far lower percentage that actually end up trying.

Ms. East explained,

> First, we look at grades and their ability. More importantly its, *do they have the work ethic?*...I want to make sure they know, up front, what's required of them and that I know that they can do it…I have conversations almost daily with my class about it. And then individual students, especially the ones that I think are on the border line.

When describing her recruitment efforts, Ms. Lewis expressed concern about the school's AP waiver policy.

> I don't know that this would help, but sometimes if our *you can't jump out of an AP class policy* prevents some of our Black and Hispanic students from jumping in because they've been encouraged to do it, but then what if it doesn't? Then you're stuck in a class where you're not successful. So, I think sometimes that fear might hold some of them up because it's a new experience and they're tied to it.

Effects of Staff Recommendations on Students. As displayed in figure 3, students reported receiving course recommendations from their teacher(s) via individual conversations, via their teacher recommending them solely through the school's course registration system (PowerSchool), and/or via individual conversations conducted when meeting with their assigned counselor during the school's annual course registration process. Of the ten student participants, eight students reported that teacher and counselor recommendations heavily and/or positively influenced their enrollment decisions. These responses were gathered by students' responses to protocol questions 1 and 2 (see Appendices E and F) and are displayed in Table 5. Displaying students' actual statements explains the ways students perceive and utilize their course recommendations throughout the registration process. Hence, despite relative student autonomy during the course registration process, teachers and counselors continue to play an important role

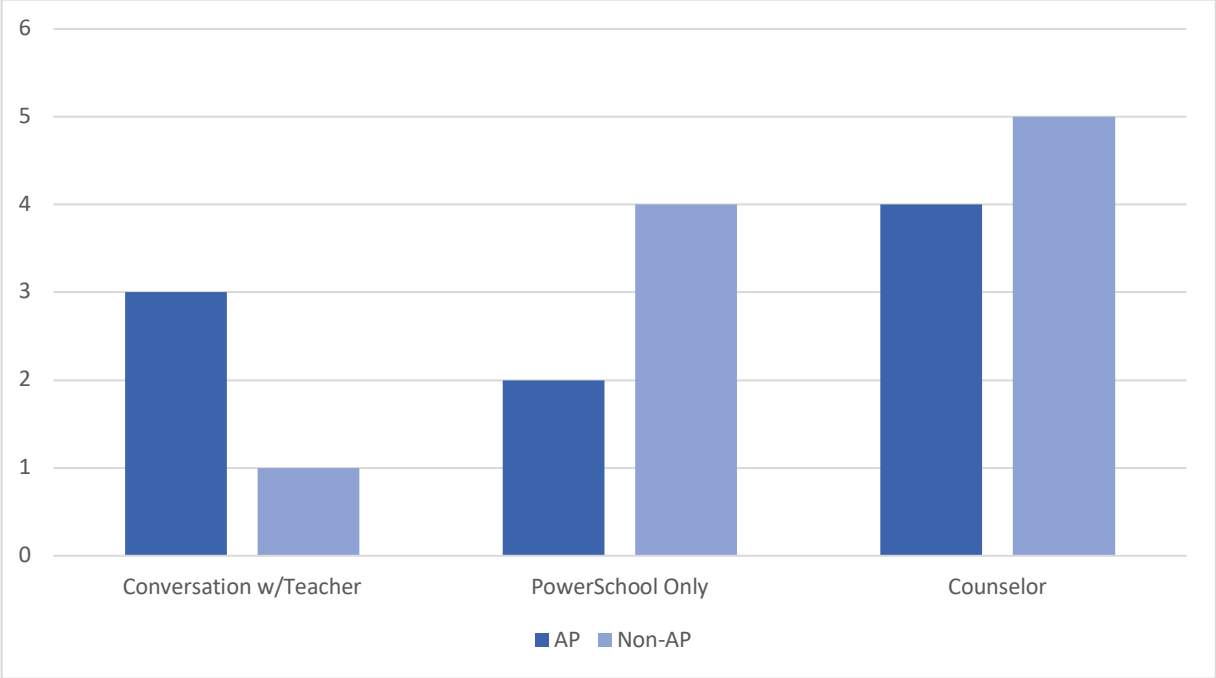


Figure 3. Methods of student recommendations.

Table 5

Student Perceptions of Course Recommendations

Effect of Recommendations	Significant Statement	Frequency, n
Positive Effect	"It has a significant effect on my registration decisions. It makes me feel like I have support, in some ways, to do those classes from my teachers. My counselor really suggests me to go for the AP and honors level classes. They try to push me to move from honors and go the AP classes because they say I would do well in those." (Braelyn)	
	"During the course registration, I always look at what the teacher suggests we do. So, I always click those classes." (Rayna)	8
	"I felt like people had faith so they pushed me even harder…If they think I can do it, then I definitely can do it. I probably wouldn't have taken an AP course if I hadn't been recommended." (Paul)	
	"It made me more likely to take that class if I was recommended for it…Usually, most of the classes I'm recommended for, I take." (Harper)	
	"A part of me expected it. The other part is like, *oh, they think I can do it.* Even though I've shown them that I can do the work…if it's a class I know I wanted to take, then I kind of trusted that I could it." (Deanna)	
	"They recommend classes on PowerSchool that they think I can take and think I'll like…Since it was recommended up there, I just clicked that one." (Andrea)	
	"She [counselor] was still pushing me to pick honors classes; to pick anything that could help my GPA." (Charity)	

Table 5 (continued)

Effect of Recommendations	Significant Statement	Frequency, n
	"She [counselor] pushes me to take more AP classes and try to challenge myself during high school." (Brooke)	
No Effect	"I'm the type of person that just gets straight to the point with everything. I figured if I already have the credits I need, and I just need to take Math 4 and English 4, I can just get it over with." (James)	
	"I probably would not have taken it [AP]. I just hear from other students that it's really hard. I'd rather get an A in an honors class than get a C in AP class." (Lanay)	

in students' academic decisions. Their encouragement and recommendations often guide students' course selections.

Institutional Practices. At the school level, teachers were able to describe holistic methods used to inform and solicit enrollment into AP courses. The most referenced means of promoting AP participation and communication included the school's yearly open house event, spring curriculum fair, and the school's RISE initiative. Open house is an event held each August before the start of school and gives parents and students the chance to get acquainted with their teachers, see the school and classrooms, and receive an overview of class expectations and course curricula. The spring curriculum fair is normally held each February shortly before the launch of course registration for the next school. During the curriculum fair, an AP session is held in the media center to provide AP course information to students and parents. A select group of the school's AP teachers normally deliver the presentation. RISE is a school-based initiative focused on identifying minority students having the capability of success in advanced-level classes, encouraging these students to enroll in these classes, and providing support to the students in these classes. When describing these school-wide methods, a common statement from school personnel included the lack of diversity of the students and parents attending these school-sponsored events.

Mr. Hall commented, "I think most of the promotion is from the teachers…I guess curriculum night…Again, at curriculum night, that's mostly the parents of the ones that are already interested in AP classes." Ms. Stroud stated,

> A lot of it is through word-of-mouth and teachers talking about it with our own classes…We do our AP night…We're not reaching a diverse student population that night. I try to make an effort to go into some 9th and 10th grade classes and talk about

> *These are the classes I teach. If you have questions, come see me…*I don't feel like there is a real concentrated or consistent effort to try and recruit kids other than those that are already interested and aware of AP.

Charity acknowledged this practice during her interview. When expounding on her experiences involving teacher recommendations, she explained her feelings when AP teachers speak with her classes about enrolling in departmental AP courses. "When we're in [honors] classes, let's say an AP teacher comes in. I feel like they [AP teacher] weren't really talking to us [Black students] because there's not many Black kids that choose honors classes.

When speaking about school-wide practices, Ms. East replied, "I know at the curriculum fair we talk about it, but other than that, I'm not sure." Counselor Gray communicated,

> I think RISE is one of the biggest things right now. I think RISE promoting themselves to other staff members could help benefit the students as well…We have a curriculum fair…If you walked into the room to observe the presentation of the AP program, the room lacked diversity. So, you're still not getting that information out to a diverse group…

Notably, each staff member interviewed mentioned the school's curriculum fair when describing methods of AP promotion. Only five staff members included RISE as a method of AP promotion. It was also recognized by five interviewees that our methods of promotion are not reaching parents and guardians of the African American students.

Cultural Privilege**: **AP Classrooms as Elite Spaces. An additional area of institutional effects included the perception that, within the school, AP classrooms have become a type of elite space reserved for students possessing specified criteria. As explained by some school personnel, this criteria includes being White and of a higher socioeconomic class. In some

instances, this aura of elitism may be held by both students and teachers. Ms. Lewis and Counselor Brown, respectively, both communicated that staff members may be culpable in the preservation of AP exclusivity. “I think that is an impression that a lot of our students and some other staff and community believe too, that being a part of the AP program is kind of an elite honor.” “…It’s seen as a privilege by the students…and teachers…You get looked at as the smarter children in the school. You’re working with the higher-level children…less behavior problems.”

Several staff elaborated on the influence that socioeconomic class and social class have had on the perceptions of AP classrooms. Ms. Stroud stated,

> I don’t think it should be that if you’re not from the right neighborhood, or right middle school, or the right race, or of the right social class, then no, this isn’t for you. It shouldn’t be that kind of privilege…Students that are in it, I think view it that way, and students that aren’t in it view it that way. I think it’s fair to say, it’s perceived that way by a lot of different people.

Ms. Adams explained how AP classrooms are the zenith of several intersections of privilege. “…it’s more likely for students that have privilege in areas at home, in finances amongst their family, or parents that have higher levels of education…what we see in AP enrollments are the culmination of a lot of those privileges.

Ms. East and Counselor Gray shared views that some White students believe AP classrooms are the appropriate setting for them regardless of their ability levels. Ms. East expressed,

> I think some of these children, based off of who they are, think it’s just automatic. They have an automatic path and automatic courses they should be taking…certain children of

> the White race, no matter what their ability is, they feel they should be in all AP or all honors courses, and that's not where they are going to be most successful.

In a like manner, Counselor Gray stated,

> …it comes across as a societal privilege. There are certain families, communities that feed into our school that they expect their students to take AP classes, and we have students that aren't working at the AP level and it's not the best environment for them; but it's what's expected and it's what's pushed. We have students that are missing the opportunity that do belong there, but it's not a part of their societal norms that they're being pushed into.

While speaking with school personnel, all participants communicated benefits that may correlate with increased African American AP enrollment including the student body being more accurately portrayed in all classrooms, enriched educational environments due to the increased diversity and perspectives, access to veteran and possibly more effective teachers (Long et al. 2012), increased confidence (Cooney et al., 2013), and the standard AP compensations of increased points towards GPA and possible college credit (Evans, 2018; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). However, five participants expressed the possibility of perceived detriments that may result from increased African American AP enrollment. These detriments were associated with the ways some may change their view of AP classrooms as these coveted, elite spaces if increased diversity were to occur. The participant statements referenced aspects of White Flight and a perceived decrease in program quality (Lichten, 2000).

With regard to an overall decreased program quality, Ms. Alvarez explained that adjustments will have to be made.

> Students may have to work a litter harder, and teachers will have to make some adjustments because not all of them are there…I think it's going to be an adjustment for the teacher…That's usually highflyers, and now, you're going to have to *really help*.

In her response, Ms. Adams alluded to the potential impairments of tokenism.

> …if the enrollment was less equitable but more in terms of just equal; like trying to hit a quota…that would undermine the standards and the expectations of what the students do, and what they produce, and what they learn, and how much they grow…Aiming for equity and ending up with a baseless equal.

Counselor Kelly feared Black students may be blamed if exam scores declined.

> Being known as a top AP school is not just because we have 26 AP courses. It's because our test scores are very, very strong…If we were to increase our number of students who are underrepresented in the AP courses, and for some reason, those scores dropped, that's where it's going to look like, *well, they can't do it*...Then, what they're going to say is, *well let's look at the makeup of the AP courses*…that's the fear I would have.

Two participants elaborated on the possibilities of White flight occurring if AP enrollment disparities decreased. Mr. Hall stated,

> Some parents of current AP students might not like that…I could see some of the old money of [site city] not liking that…They may not send their kids to [site school]…there's a couple of private schools around…it's becoming a more viable option than it has been in the past.

When discussing White flight, Ms. Lewis explained how a portion of White students would remain enrolled at the school because of the extracurricular activities offered, and in lieu of taking AP courses with an increasing minority population, these students would opt to enroll in

community college courses where they would benefit from the same weighted GPA points for the college course as they would have received from an AP course.

> …if they were happy with some of the AP classes their students were in or happy with some of the athletic programs their students were a part of or other programs, they would go the community college route…The other would go the private school route.

Focus Group Analysis

A critical component of CRT is ensuring that marginalized groups have the opportunity to provide their own narratives and perspectives when describing specific moments of exclusion, discrimination, and/or perceived racial prejudice or marginalization (Terry & Howard, 2013). In an effort to ensure school personnel participants were exposed to the students' *voice-of-color* (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), I facilitated a focus group in which the thematic analysis (see Table 2) of the student interviews along with specific interview excerpts were shared with inquiry partners, counselor interviewees, and teacher interviewees.

Group participants led an area of discussion to focus on the supporting themes of inadequate parental support in the realm of course registration and in the need for the school to improve AP information distribution. Participants focused on the importance of welcoming parents and making them feel included in school processes. Ms. Long (IP #5) assessed the lack of diversity when hosting school-wide information sessions.

> I feel like we have open house, and underclassmen night, and senior night, and we get this information out. We have very little attendance. What else can we do to get it out there? Even when you do have attendance, it's the same families who could probably answer the questions themselves. How do we get it to the people who need it this most?

The group expressed certain roadblocks these underrepresented parent groups may experience. Ms. Jordan (IP #1) expressed,

> We're getting parents kind of at a deficit. They've already had, sometimes, negative experiences from middle school or elementary school parent organizations or other school-related things. They already don't see themselves being the involved parent group. When we look at our parent groups today, they're just as different as our class dynamics are. If people felt more welcomed and more a part of that group, we would have more people come and attend those nights.

Ms. Adams stated, "…you have to be pretty confident to walk into a school, especially a high school, that you don't know much about and navigate it. How can we raise confidence and make people feel welcome and belonging?" Ms. Long (IP #5) and Ms. Adams suggested methods of parent outreach included working with community and/or religious organizations.

The next area of discussion revolved around the importance of student course recommendations during the enrollment process and negative effects that tracking have had on some minority students. When speaking about the CoP efforts, Ms. Jordan (IP #1) communicated,

> The first year we did it with registration, it was more personalized. We brought the kids in and said what do you feel like you're the best in? Take that step up in that area. You don't have to do all of them. That first year, it made a difference in AP. My AP was more diverse that year. Unfortunately, Covid hit, and in the classroom, it wasn't as diverse.

Ms. Lewis volunteered information about her classes, "My honors classes have been increasingly getting more diverse. This probably is the most diverse honors class I've had." Counselor Kelly replied,

> This is where it's so important that recommendations be done for students. When we meet with them individually to go over their course registrations, we pull up their recommendations…That helps us be able to say, you've got somebody that's ready to push you. They know you can do it. They've got your back. That says a lot. Those kids that have those recommendations, they'll go with it.

Ms. Stroud supplemented the previous statement with,

> Recommendations are key, but I think the teacher needs to have a conversation along with the recommendation. If I just put it in, but I don't tell that kid, *I believe in you I recommend you for this b/c I see this, this, and this*, then it's harder for you to persuade them. But if they're hearing it from me, and they're hearing it from you [counselor], then we have a better chance of getting them in. It takes class time, but it's worth it

During the discussion, after supplying excerpts on students' use of teacher and counselor recommendations, I read a statement from James who elaborated on how he feels not being identified as AIG in elementary school has affected his course registrations decisions thereafter.

> …in elementary school, I did try to go for higher classes. I was pretty smart, and I did have all As in my classes…there was this high, honors class. I forgot the name of it…For some reason, it got me down because I never even had the opportunity to get into AIG even though I was basically an honor roll student. Every decision from then on affected that.

The group then examined the limitations that academic tracking may have put on many students. Ms. Lewis explained how, based on middle school tracking, her son may have not taken an AP class if she did not work for the school and have knowledge of student/parent choice when enrolling in courses. "When we came from a public charter school to middle school here,

his math was not sufficient, but his reading was off the charts. As a result, he got put in the lowest level of academics in middle school." Mr. Cook (IP #2) expressed the effects of early high school misplacement on students' academic standing. "…that does affect GPA your first year. Those are opportunity points you can't get back to be as competitive as other people." Ms. Jordan (IP #1) replied,

> We've got to stop sorting kids based on one test. It's just not right. It needs to be open and fluid…if a student is making all As and is doing level 4s on their EOGs, they should have those opportunities to advance in certain areas. We [CoP] talked at one point how everything is dependent on your math; for a little while at some schools. Even if you were higher level in reading, you couldn't get in [AIG] if you weren't higher level in math. It's doesn't make any sense…Here it's fluid…you can move. I can be an AP student. Maybe I'm not a great English student. So, I need to be in honors or standard. But these kids are stuck in tracks all the way until they get to us. Then, they think they're stuck in a track even from that point.

The group also expounded upon school-wide measures to increase aid in the school's disparate advanced-level course representation. Possible approaches included providing more blended classes allowing students to transition from standard to honors level classes within the same classroom. With administrative approval, teachers are able to collaborate with counselors to amend a student's course level during the progression of that semester. Ms. Stroud stated,

> With finding kids who are in the wrong level, and trying to right them, I love teaching my law class because it's a blended class. Honors and standard in the same class. I'm quite often finding mostly Brown and Black students that are in the standard section that are performing as well as the honors kids. I'm able to correct that easily.

Counselor Kelly advocated for community building in AP classrooms so that marginalized students feel a sense of belonging. “What do we need to do to come in a classroom and help build community? Part of it is students don’t feel comfortable with their classmates.” Ms. Stroud continued with,

> In advising kids, we probably need to know ourselves as teachers and be honest and open of, *this is a good class to try an AP class, and this is not a good first AP class.* That’s not in any way trying to criticize another teacher, but we need to, as a faculty, know which ones are going to focus more on the skills that are going to prepare you for college and career and which ones are going to be very test-driven. Because a lot of the students that you’ve [practitioner] talked to and others don’t necessarily need their first AP class to be one that’s very test-driven.

Summary

School personnel realize their individual practices, in conjunction with a student’s family and peers, have influence on the enrollment decisions of African American students. Their recommendations, support, encouragement, or lack thereof, permeate students’ registration thought processes and actions. School personnel were also able to articulate reasoning and ways in which enrollment recruitment efforts must be improved in order to bolster parental knowledge of the AP program and increase students’ academic confidence and sense of belonging in AP classrooms.

Phase Three Findings

The third inquiry question sought to discover methods of improving institutional structures to decrease African American AP enrollment disparities.

Q3: How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

This was informed through participants' responses to the semi-structured, interview instruments: questions 9, 11, and 15-18 on the student interview protocol (see Appendices E and F); questions 2, 6, 14, and 15 on the teacher interview protocol (see Appendix G), questions 2, 4, 10, and 14 on the counselor interview protocol (see Appendix H); and the middle school counselor interview protocol (see Appendix I). Additional data sources included quantitative, cumulative enrollment data, analysis of relevant school registration documents and procedures, and analysis of documents and activities created through collaboration and improvement efforts with the practitioner's Community of Practice (CoP).

High School Recommendation Procedures

Student and staff participant interview data revealed student recommendation procedures as a needed area of improvement. While each core department has an outline or has fashioned a sort of flow/information chart to advise recommendations and sequencing (See Appendices G - J), personnel participant responses were not entirely congruent when discussing recommendation practices. Some teachers described a more formal, rigid process while others emphasized a more subjective, free-flowing operation.

Teachers Stroud, East, Lewis, and Adams all described a more formal approach to the recommendation process. Ms. Stroud explained,

> Whichever class they're enrolled in for the current school year, that teacher makes a recommendation for the social studies level for the next year…Typically, the advice is, if they are making an A or B, they should be recommended for honors or AP. If they're making below a B, they're recommended for standard…As a department, we have talked

about we want to look at things such as motivation. AP takes a high level of motivation, so we want to identify kids who are motivated. Some kids are able to make an A or B with very little effort, and that's probably not the best kid for AP because it's going to take some effort to be successful. We also look at their reading and writing ability because the AP is going to require more reading and writing. So those would be the additional things we factor in…Does it also sometimes come down to certain kids or parents that advocate for themselves to be recommended for upper levels? Yes, it does. I try to have individual conversations with all of my students when I'm doing the recommendations, and there are some kids that will advocate…But there are other kids that, if I say honors and they really want to do AP, they're not going to advocate for themselves, or they don't have a parent who's going to come advocate for them. So, while we have tried to give some advice and some consistency to how we make recommendations, are there kids that probably get put a level lower than they should be because they're not a self-advocate or don't have an advocate for them? Yes, I'm sure it does happen for them more than I know.

Housed in the same department as Ms. Stroud, Ms. Lewis similarly explained,

> For our department [social studies], we have a pretty open policy with recommending for AP. We talk about the students…we'll usually say they should have an 80 or higher in a class before you should go to AP. 85 is optimal, but you have to look at the kid. Are they a good test taker? Somebody who isn't good at multiple choice might be great at writing, and you can work on those skills or vice versa.

The school's AP mathematics courses encompass the fewest AP selection in the school. To participate in math AP courses, students must enroll in and pass pre-calculus. Therefore, all of

the mathematics recommendations are filtered through students' pre-calculus performance. Similar to social studies, Ms. East described applying a student's final average to determine AP recommendations. However, the teacher added,

> I have two kids right now in [AP] Calculus that made 66s in pre-calculus, and they're doing fine…but it was a conversation that we had when meeting with parents and said, *this is not the recommendation, but I think your kid can do it,* and kind of laid that foundation before going into it.

Neither of the two students were African American.

When discussing the English department, Ms. Adams discussed,

> …if you are in an honors course and you maintain an A/B, you're recommended for AP. In standard, if they're at an A or a high B, and you think they could make the effort, you recommend for honors. In [English] 1 and 2 there's a big push in terms of recommending them for Paideia, because Paideia is a great way for them to grow and get to the honors level if they're at a higher, mid-standard level…A's or interest in growing writing skills and interest in putting more time outside of school to devote to some of those ELA skills would be for AP. I also always ask, *if you want me to recommend you for AP, this or that, let me know; I'll absolutely recommend you for it. If I didn't recommend you for it, but you want to do it, go for it. and I will back you; I will vouch for you*, *and I will talk to you about what my concerns might be and how to approach them.*

As previously stated, although each core department has recommendation guidelines, some participants described a, somewhat, informal approach to the recommendation process. Mr. Hall stated,

> Normally, it's just when we're PLCing (Professional Learning Community). We'll bring up different students that we think would be good for it…each teacher, individually, does their own recommendations, but we talk about the ones we have questions about…Then we make the decision from there. Normally for AP classes, we look at their grades in other classes too.

Ms. Lewis communicated, "The AP teacher goes at the end of the term, to all honors courses and talks about the courses and students in that course also come and talk to the kids about those courses…There's also recommending them through the system."

Two of the four high school counselors interviewed cited inconsistent recommendation practices amongst the school and, more specifically, inconsistencies within departments. Counselor Brown commented,

> The registration process…If they [teachers] would do it like they're supposed to. Some teachers do, some teachers don't. The ones who do it correctly look at the grades and what the student is capable of. If they can do a higher-level class, they put them in there. The ones that don't, they don't put it in [PowerSchool] or they just do a mass "next level class".

In a complementary manner, Counselor Gray stated,

> There are times that the recommendations are made in a haste manner. You can tell it was rushed and doesn't always match their students, for the positive and negative. There are also times there isn't a recommendation, and if the students don't have that recommendation or that push, they go to their safe area.

When discussing departmental recommendation trends, Counselor Gray communicated,

> We typically see recommendations from math teachers. English can be very sporadic, as well as science. Social studies are almost too recommendation happy…Some teachers will go in and just click every honors/AP class offered by social studies, and that turns into an overwhelming experience for the student.

Both counselors expressed how the lack of, or receipt of inappropriate recommendations hampers their counseling influence during the registration process. In these instances, they explained reviewing students' grades and previous performance to help counteract recommendations they feel are improper. Counselor Gray expressed, "…we try to view the student's past and help guide them, but we always say a teacher's recommendation should be one of their huge guiding points…So, when the teacher makes that recommendation…we have to support it."

Middle School Recommendation Procedures

To gather insight into the middle school registration process, a middle school counselor (Ms. Cox) employed by one of the study site's feeder middle schools was interviewed. In addition, I observed an evening information session hosted at the feeder school to inform parents of the registration process and present general high school academic policies and procedures.

The counselor and I first spoke about middle school AIG procedures as enrollment in a gifted program in elementary or middle school is often a precursor to enrollment in higher-level courses in high school (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014). Counselor Cox stated, "Most students come into middle school already identified…We don't really have a system where we're proactively trying to seek out additional AIG students." It was communicated that at the middle school level, students are only formally tested for AIG entry if a parent requests testing. If a

parent does request this, it has predominantly been the parent of a White student transferring from a private school.

When discussing the registration process for 8th graders entering high school, Counselor Cox emphasized how heavily the 8th grade middle school teachers rely on the guidance of the high school teachers. She stated,

> We follow what our two feeder schools' teachers suggest. We have an articulation meeting. All the English, Science, Social Studies, and Math teachers give us documents (see Appendices J – M) that say if a student is making an A or B then they take… Our teachers follow that heavily. They don't really waiver from that.

The counselor explained that the teachers follow this guidance so heavily because, due to their certification(s), they are unfamiliar with their core area's corresponding high school curriculum. The counselor guides the registration process for each 8th grade student at the school but is not involved in the recommendation process. "I kind of help if they [students] tell me their interests…I may help make recommendations for electives."

Counselor Cox stated that she communicates with parents if they contact her with questions about classes or recommendations, "but usually, whatever the teacher recommends is what the student goes with. Our teachers play a really big role in which placement our students get. Whether that's a good thing or bad thing, I don't know."

During the parent information session hosted by the middle school, the high school counselors visited and provided a presentation to parents in attendance. Attendance was very low relative to the 8th grade student population; seven parents were present. During this information session, AP courses were not discussed; the counselors briefly mentioned honors courses during a brief registration guide review. On the contrast, AP and honors courses were heavily discussed

during a *private school information night* held during the same month (February) at the high school study site. The private school information night is held yearly for incoming parents and students who have previously attended private school but plan to begin attending public school (study site location) for the 9th grade.

Community of Practice Analysis

As a method to aid in improving minority enrollment in advanced level courses, the practitioner and five colleagues (inquiry partners) developed a Community of Practice (CoP) to address this educational phenomena. As a part of this study, this CoP, titled RISE, engaged in the four-step, cyclical model of action research: a) planning, (b) taking action, (c) evaluating the action, (d) further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Planning

During the initial planning phase of the action research cycle, the CoP engaged in a review of student data for 9th and 10th grade students during the spring of the 2020 academic year. The CoP reviewed the following applicable data for each freshman and sophomore minority student in the school: current and previous semester grades, middle school EOG scores, high school EOC scores, PreACT scores, AIG classification, and current GPA. In conjunction with gathering teacher recommendation data to aid in assessing student potential and work ethic, this data was purposed to determine students the CoP believed could be enrolled in and have success in higher level courses or who were currently in higher level courses that we wanted to provide supports for.

Once data collection was complete, the CoP selected 53 students to be a part of the RISE cohort: 29 freshmen and 24 sophomores. Of the 53 cohort participants, 43 are demographically identified as African American: 21 freshmen and 22 sophomores. The ten remaining students are

demographically identified as Hispanic or Asian as documented in the school's PowerSchool database. Students received a formal letter (see Appendix N) to deliver to their parent(s)/guardian(s) providing an explanation of the RISE program, why their student was selected, supports we planned to provide to the student, and an invitation to an upcoming parent meeting to further discuss the program. The supports cited in the written communication included: peer support in the cohort in and out of the classroom setting, information about opportunities such as scholarships and educational programs, as well as support to take advantage of opportunities, support with study habits, personalized registration focused on student and parent choice, college and career planning, parent opportunities for college planning and information sessions. The parent information session was held on February 27, 2020, at 7:00 pm; seven parent/guardians were in attendance. During this information session, parents were given a survey to complete. This survey collected updated contact information and information regarding their vision and goals for their student. One survey question asked parents what topic(s) they would like more information about, and each parent selected either benefits of and/or the difference between standard, honors, AP, and community college courses. The CoP also conducted a student meeting during the school's intervention period to discuss these same aspects with the selected students.

During the spring 2020 semester, the cohort students were provided personalized registration assistance during scheduled student sessions with CoP members. The objective of this guidance was to encourage students to register for advanced level classes based on their interests and proven ability and strengths in certain curriculum areas. The guidance counselor in the CoP was instrumental in ensuring students were placed in advanced-level courses and positioned in classes with a cohort of their RISE peers.

Taking Action

Following the selection of RISE students and completion of the registration process, the CoP developed a plan to provide targeted supports for students during the 2020-2021 academic year. Originally, the CoP aspired to convene with RISE students twice per month in order to complete team building activities, provide college and career planning guidance, and to provide academic support. However, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the functioning of schools during the duration of the 2020-2021 school year. In North Carolina, schools were allowed to reopen with an emphasis on a combination of in-person instruction and distance learning. While some districts in the state did not allow face-to-face instruction when school began in August 2020, in this school district, schools were opened with the option for students to attend face-to-face if their parent/guardian agreed to this. At the study site location, students choosing to attend face-to-face were only allowed to attend school on alternating weeks based on the alphabet of their last name: Students with last names beginning with A-L attended Week A, and students with last name beginning with M-Z attended Week B. Alternating weeks were established to adhere to mandated safety/health protocol guidelines. While in school, students and staff were required to wear face masks and social distance by remaining at least six feet apart. Students choosing to attend school 100% remotely were responsible for logging on to the district's remote learning platform each day to complete assignments and receive instruction via Zoom teleconferencing technology.

Unfortunately, many high school students disengaged during this time. Of the 53 RISE students, 21 attended school during the alternating weeks of face-to-face instruction, and the remaining 32 students attending school entirely virtually. Nonetheless, the CoP followed their support plan of providing small group team building activities, academic support, and general

"check-ins" to build relationships and assist in whatever ways were needed by students. The 53 cohort members were arranged into 5 small groups assigned to each CoP partner. CoP partners facilitated group activities electronically, via Zoom, in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines and as a strategy to include the numerous students engaged in 100% virtual learning. The CoP continued to convene and plan for activities and supports for cohort members. When discussing Cohort participation, a common theme from each CoP partner was the low rate of cohort attendance during our scheduled student meeting times.

Evaluating the Action

As a means of evaluating the overall effectiveness of CoP course enrollment efforts at the study site, data was collected on the African American student course enrollment trends pre- and post-RISE cohort membership. Table 6 and figure 4 show the number of honors students and the number of honors courses African American students were enrolled in for years 2019-2020 through 2021-2022. These displays include individual students who may have taken more than one course.

Data shows an increase in honors course students and course enrollments for the 2020-2021 year. However, these areas of measurement decreased to numbers lower than pre-RISE cohort implementation for the 2021-2022 year.

Table 7 and figure 5 display the Advanced Placement students and the number of AP courses these students were enrolled in for years 2019-2020 through 2021-2022. These displays include individual students who may have taken more than one course.

Similar to the cohort's honors-level enrollments, AP course enrollments received a substantial increase in the total number of African American students enrolled and in the number of courses in which these students chose to register. Following this initial increase in 2020-2021,

Table 6

Number of RISE African American, Honors-Level Students and the Number of Honors Course Enrollments

School Year	Number of Honors Students	Total Honors Course Enrollments
2019-2020	36	133
2020-2021	40	140
2021-2022	32	84

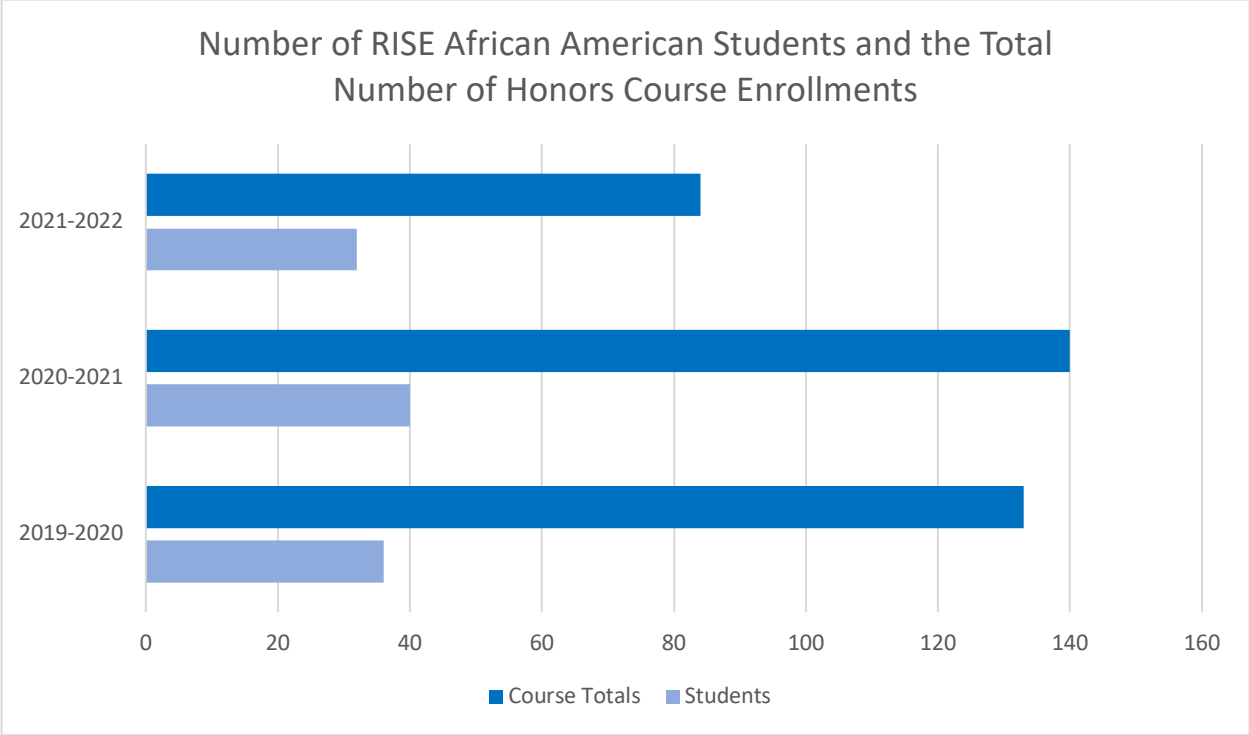


Figure 4. The total number of RISE African American, honors-level students and the number of honors-level course enrollments for 2019-2020 through 2021-2022.

Table 7

Number of RISE African American, Advanced Placement Students and the Number of AP Course Enrollments

School Year	Number of AP Students	Total AP Course Enrollments
2019-2020	3	4
2020-2021	22	36
2021-2022	16	28

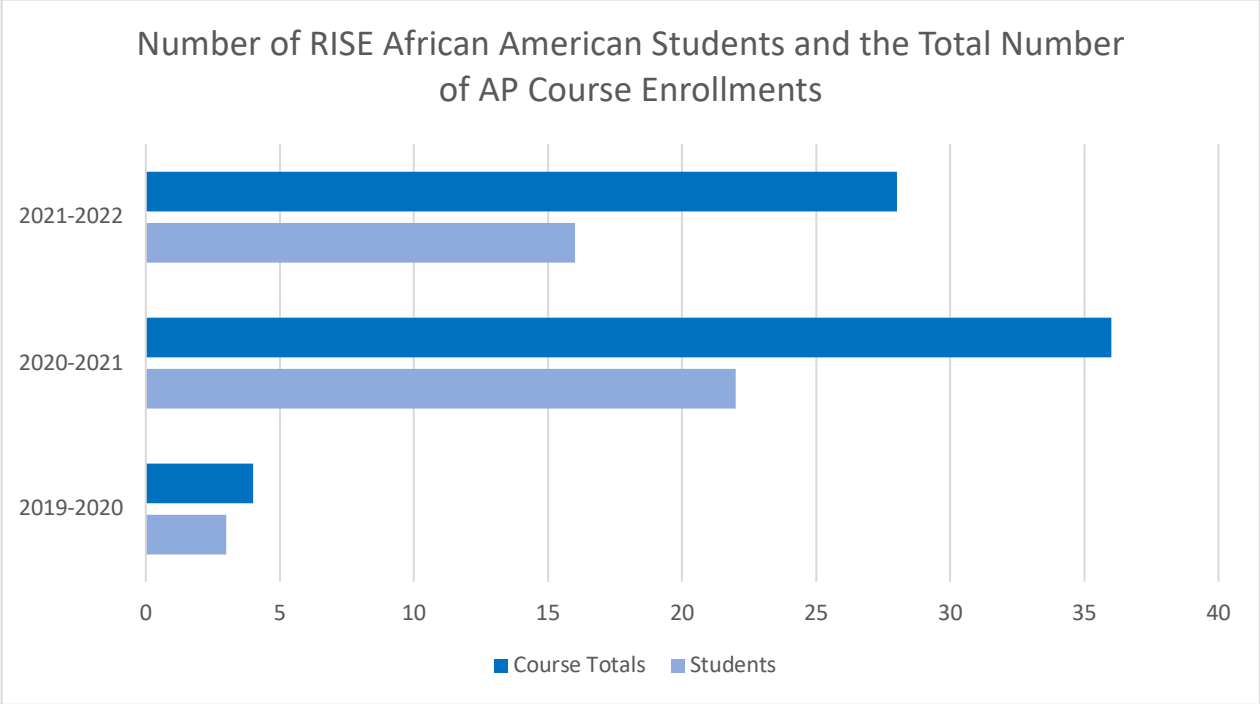


Figure 5. The total number of RISE African American, AP students and the number of AP course enrollments for 2019-2020 through 2021-2022.

the following year presented a decrease in African American enrollment. Despite this decrease, cohort AP enrollment did not fall below pre-RISE cohort implementation. At the conclusion of the Fall 2020 semester, the CoP conducted a GPA comparison to determine the effects of higher-level course enrollments on student's cumulative GPAs. Of the 43 African American cohort students, 22 students reflected a decrease in GPA due to course leveling, and 19 students maintained or increased their GPA due to course leveling. Two students did not take any honors or AP courses resulting in no comparative data. It should be noted that a decrease in GPA does not necessarily reflect failure in advanced level courses. For instance, a student who took standard English I freshmen year (score 95) and took honors English II sophomore year (score 89) would still have seen a decrease in overall GPA.

Overall data for the 3-year RISE, CoP initiative shows an increase in the percentage of African American students in AP courses. As previously stated, minority enrollment decreased following the 2020-2021 year of hybrid learning (virtual and face-to-face), but AP enrollment for both White and African American students decreased following that academic year, possibly an effect of hybrid learning. Table 8 displays the AP enrollment trends for both these groups during the specified 3-year period.

An additional evaluation data point included student study participants providing insight into the ways RISE did or did not benefit them and what suggestions they could offer for improvement. Rayna commented that she feels RISE is doing a good job but acknowledged the need for students to remain involved in the cohort activities. She suggested, "…force them [students] to come to your office or to your classroom during whatever time. I think that would be good. Helping them with tutoring." Charity expressed how she did not initially realize the benefits of the cohort. "Maybe it was because of Covid, and we didn't get to meet face-to-face."

Table 8

AP Enrollment Totals during Years 2019-2020 through 2021-2022

	2019 – 2020		2020 – 2021		2021 – 2022	
Race	A.A.	White	A.A.	White	A.A.	White
AP Enrollment	31	232	40	237	32	203
School Pop.	713	528	696	508	709	476
AP Population %	9.7	72.7	12.4	73.6	11.2	71.2

Note. Total AP population in 2019-2020 = 319; 2020-2021 = 322; 2021-2022 = 285.

Paul commented on the benefits of RISE for students without adequate support at home. “For the kids that don’t have someone, like my mom, that will check your grades and make sure…yes, it would help them a lot.” Rayna, Andrea, and James explained that they appreciated the information received during the various student sessions. Specifically, James learned of applying for scholarships and ways to receive financial aid for college. Andrea replied,

> This one day, you all gave notes on studying, and told us different ways you can study…It made me think about colleges and the GPA you need to get in certain colleges…ACT scores and if you want to take the SAT; stuff like that.

Further Planning

As previously explained, action research is an ongoing model for change and improvement. It is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Through continual data analysis and student feedback, the CoP has continued to plan for and initiate new cohorts of students into a progressing RISE program. Inquiry partners and I continue to collect data to better understand and assess CoP efforts during an academic year without the previous restrictions of Covid mandates.

Critical Race Theory Analysis

All emergent themes demonstrated a certain degree of alignment to the CRT conceptual framework tenets. The first emergent them, deficit-oriented characterizations, exposed the manner in which students’ experiences and perceptions of race within school have caused them to place negative socially constructed and differential racialized views upon themselves. Despite success in honors level courses, students largely cited low levels of confidence and doubted their capability of handling the academic rigor of AP courses while associating positively constructed views towards their White counterparts in those courses. These sentiments were corroborated by

teacher interview data which conveyed that much of the school community [teachers, students, and parents] view White AP students as smarter and less disruptive and view advanced-level classrooms as the natural educational placement for the majority of White students regardless of whether or not their actual academic ability suits this placement. Within the context of this particular school setting, AP classrooms have aided in the social construct of White students being viewed as smarter, collectively having higher education aspirations, and possessing a perceived level of wealth needed in order to *belong* in these courses. This racialization process has perpetuated the social devaluing and deficit-oriented views of Black students (Martin, 2009).

The emergent themes encompassing levels of influence and enrollment solicitation show that staff have a significant ability to influence the enrollment decisions of AA students. Each teacher and counselor provided commentary on the ways they individually recommend and attempt to support students in taking advanced-level courses. While it is understood that study participant samples cannot *perfectly* represent an identified population, staff interview responses did not fully align with student responses in regard to staff recruitment and recommendation efforts. Six student participants communicated that a teacher has never had an individual conversation with them about enrolling in an AP course, and nearly all student participants lacked an expected level of working knowledge surrounding the usefulness of AP courses. Moreover, before the implementation of this study, there was no intentional effort, school-wide or within academic departments, to consistently or collectively encourage and increase African American AP enrollment. There seemed to be an existence of gatekeeping regarding AP information distribution and in meaningful efforts of teachers to solicit minority AP enrollment.

Previous efforts to increase enrollment have been done through a neutral and colorblind approach which reinforce racial patterns of White dominance. It could be posed that if AA

enrollment substantially increases, AP classrooms may no longer be viewed as the elite academic and social space for White students which could result in the following: White students/families withdraw from the school (White flight) in large numbers, students choose to remain at the school but opt to dual enroll in community college courses in lieu of AP courses, AP teachers lose an entire course or sections of their AP course(s) to accommodate enrollment fluctuations. Subsequently, if the aforementioned results occurred, the school would lose its coveted reputation of being a preeminent AP destination.

The feelings of marginalization experienced by Black students may be a manifestation of endemic racism within the school environment. An open AP enrollment policy along with, arguably, subjective teacher recommendation practices have been used to bolster ideals of equal opportunity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. However, as evidenced by ongoing, racial enrollment disparities, these ideals have not been successful in changing the almost complete segregation that is prominent in AP and advanced-level classrooms. The absence of Black students in these learning environments has become an expected and accepted norm while Black students continue to feel like outsiders; unwelcomed, overlooked and ignored in advanced-level classrooms. By being exposed to students' authentic and unfiltered educational perceptions and experiences (*voice-of-color*), school staff were forced to confront and analyze possible ways they and/or the school culture have been complicit in fostering an environment that has not been equal for all.

Chapter Summary

The data presented in this chapter sought to identify the ways that institutional structures and procedures may be improved to promote African American Advanced Placement participation. Chapter 4 displayed the results of this study which included the qualitative and

quantitative data that emerged through participant interviews and enrollment analysis while implementing action research cycles focused on improved organizational recruitment and enrollment efforts. In the next chapter, I will summarize this study, address implications for the findings, and provide recommendations moving forward.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDAITONS

The purpose of this single-case study (Yin, 2014) was to examine and improve the study site's recruitment structure for advanced level courses and better understand factors that African American students in one North Carolina high school attributed to their lack of participation in Advanced Placement courses. Since the AP program's inception, there has been continued growth in the number of schools offering AP courses and in the number of students participating in AP courses (College Board, 2020). However, in spite if this continued overall growth, African American students continue to constitute the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms (College Board, 2014a). Hence, with the growth in opportunity to take advantage of AP course enrollment, a perpetual issue continues to be how to address students who have the aptitude and perceived opportunity to engage in AP and higher-level courses but choose not to. In addressing this issue, it was important to acknowledge and inspect the role that race and racial discrimination may play with respect to this educational disparity.

Previous studies have shown the importance and benefits of AP classes (Patrick et al., 2020; Kettler & Hurst, 2017; Attewell & Domina, 2008) as well as barriers that African American students face in their efforts to participate in advanced-level curricula (Darity et al., 2001; Ford, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tyson, 2011). Additionally, research has shown that simply providing minority students more access to and offerings of AP classes does not guarantee or even perpetuate increased enrollment (Klopfenstein, 2004a; Rodriguez, & McGuire, 2019). This study builds upon this literature base by exploring the perceptions and experiences of African American students, exploring the beliefs and perceptions of school personnel towards African American students, and exploring ways to improve institutional structures to promote African American AP participation.

To adequately examine the aforementioned areas, this study specifically sought to answer the following inquiry questions:

Q1. How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?

Q2. What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?

Q3. How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

To answer these questions, this study utilized a qualitative, single case study design in conjunction with an action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) component to determine the effects of institutional change initiatives. A criterion-based, purposeful sampling method was used to identify ten students, six teachers, and five counselors who participated in individual interviews. School personnel (teachers and counselors) were also invited to participate in a focus group to discuss the scholarly practitioner's student interview analysis. The questions used in the semi-structured interview protocols were aligned to the research questions. Triangulation was achieved through analysis of student and school personnel interview data, the school's recruitment and recommendation documents and structures, and by examining AP and advanced course enrollment trends over a multi-year period. Interview transcript coding was used to identify themes related to the research questions and conceptual framework. The remainder of this chapter serves to summarize the overall findings of this study, the conclusions that can be made from the study, and recommendations for future research and implications for practice.

Summary of Key Findings

With the goal of improving institutional structures to promote increased African American participation in Advanced Placement and advanced-level courses, the findings were presented in detail and organized by research questions and their corresponding action phases. All data sources from the interviews, enrollment information, and CoP documents and activities were considered as they provided insight into each inquiry question as a means to develop themes and possible best practices moving forward.

Inquiry Question One Summary Findings

How are the academic and enrollment experiences of African American students affected by their perception of race?

The first inquiry question sought to examine the impact and perception of race on students' academic experiences and enrollment decisions. Student participants were asked a series of semi-structured interview questions and were allowed to provide any additional information they deemed pertinent and relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The rationale for proposing this question was multi-faceted as this question supported the analysis of several CRT components as deduced through student participant responses.

Findings indicated students perceived themselves to be operating in a deficit with regard to their academic ability and parental support when referencing their access to advanced-level curricula. Each student equated positive attributes toward their White peers (Ford et al., 2008) in Advanced Placement courses using descriptors such as smart, hardworking, financially stable, and having college aspirations while describing several disadvantages associated with African American students. These disadvantages included possessing a lack of confidence and a lack of financial recourses that White students may have available to them in order to undergird their AP

success. Adding to feelings of being disadvantaged, more than half of the student participants received no parental guidance during course registration and explained having complete autonomy in their registration decisions. Nearly all students stated their parents were unaware of information regarding the purpose and benefits of AP courses.

Another major finding suggests students feel a sense of marginalization within the school community and within advanced-level classrooms. Students described feelings of isolation (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008), being overlooked or ignored, not being given information about higher level courses, and/or general feelings of not belonging when speaking about their experiences in honors and AP classrooms. Students collectively described not having a *community* in their advanced-level courses and routinely experienced feelings of alienation and discomfort when interacting with White peers and teachers. Similar to Tyson's (2011) study, for students who chose not to enroll in AP courses, a commonality emerged that students chose to enroll in courses they felt would be most comfortable for them socially and in courses they felt they had the largest chance of success. While there was still a limited number of African American students in honors classes, non-AP students believed these classes would house a larger number of their racial peers than AP courses, offering a greater sense of comfort and community. For African American students in AP courses, their desire to achieve often outweighed their need for social comfort.

When discussing their view of advanced course teachers, students discussed a belief that some teachers show favoritism toward White students and provide an inadequate amount of academic support to African American students. Similar to their parents, the majority of the students, both AP and non-AP, could not thoroughly describe the possible benefits or purpose of AP classes, which demonstrated a possible lack of proper information distribution to this group.

Similar to Ford et al.'s (2008) findings, while some students chose to persevere and enroll in AP classes, for others, race and academic experiences pertaining to their race have been contributing factors in their decisions not to enroll in these courses.

Inquiry Question Two Summary Findings

What effect do teachers and school counselors have on the AP enrollment decisions of African American students?

The second inquiry question sought to examine the impact of school personnel on the registration decisions of African American students. This inquiry question was primarily measured through the teachers' reported accounts and perceptions of the enrollment and recruitment process along with the students' perceptions of ways school personnel affect their enrollment decisions.

Findings indicated school personnel attribute themselves, along with students' families and peers, as having significant influence on students' enrollment decisions. School counselors and teachers overwhelming contributed enrollment disparities to the, often, lack of support African American students received from parents. Much of this was credited to the belief that Black parents do not have the working knowledge of the AP program that White parents tend to have. School personnel recognized the lack of affect current methods of AP recruitment and solicitation are having on reaching the African American community. A common realization is that school-wide events have a lack of diversity in the students and parents that attend. Peer influence was more so connected to students wanting to learn in environments they deemed as more socially accepting and comfortable rather than to students being ostracized for simply taking advanced-level courses (Tyson, 2011).

When describing ways they may help and/or hinder student enrollments, each teacher and counselor described examples and methods they have utilized including individual conversations with students, whole-class conversations, and PowerSchool to encourage and recommend African Americans students for AP courses. However, student interview data revealed less than half of student participants reported ever engaging in an individual conversation with a teacher for AP enrollment solicitation as opposed to nearly all (nine) confirming they had this type of conversation with their counselor.

Additional findings indicate that, within the school, AP classrooms are often viewed as elite spaces by both students and staff and that staff may play a role in the preservation of AP exclusivity. AP students are viewed as higher intellectually, better behaved, and of a higher wealth class. According to school personnel, many White students view AP classrooms as the appropriate setting for themselves regardless of their academic ability. While school personnel described benefits of increased AP diversity, they acknowledged possible adverse results such as White Flight to private schools (Lichten, 2000), a perceived decrease in program quality, and minority student blame if exam scores diminished.

Ultimately, school personnel realize their individual recruitment practices in conjunction with institutional practices have influence on the enrollment decisions of African American students. As expressed by student participants, teacher recommendations strongly guide their course selections. Though students and parents have the ability to play a more active role in the course selection process, school personnel may still serve as gatekeepers that exclude African Americans in advanced-level curricula.

Inquiry Question Three Summary Findings

How can institutional structures be improved to promote AP participation among African American students?

The third inquiry question was proposed to uncover methods to improve school-wide practices in decreasing AP enrollment disparities. Interview data and procedure analysis revealed a need for a transparent and collective student recommendation protocol. There was a lack of uniformity in teacher solicitation and recruitment methods, recommendation criteria used, and in the proper and consistent use of PowerSchool to recommend students for classes.

There seemed to be rigid uniformity in the recommendation process used by 8th grade teachers during the 8th to 9th grade registration process in middle school. However, 8th grade teachers were quoted to be limited in their knowledge of high school curriculum and rely heavily on the suggested recommendation format given to them by the high school core content areas (see Appendices J - M). In addition, honors and AP level course information is not thoroughly shared with rising 9th grade students or their parents. It was also revealed that students entering middle school not previously identified as AIG have little opportunity to be identified as such while in middle school, which has the ability to affect their high school academic track.

Targeted school efforts by a team of inquiry partners forming a Community of Practice (RISE) were able to create a model of registration, student cohort, and student support systems to increase the overall percentage of African American students enrolled in AP courses over a three-year period (2019-2020 through 2021-2022). The RISE model was constructed in direct response to research on the phenomena: the importance of African American students receiving personalized registration support and advanced course enrollment encouragement; the need for instructional staff to utilize various data points when determining a student's ability to succeed in

advanced-level curricula, the benefits of diminishing minority feelings of isolation and alienation in AP classrooms.

CRT Summary Findings

Critical Race Theory is the conceptual framework that provides a structure for this study. At its essence, CRT recognizes the intersectionality among race, racism, and power and maintains the belief that racism is inherently woven into our societal structures and racist systems must be understood, challenged, and dismantled (Roithmayr, 1999). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) first theorized race as a tool to deconstruct educational inequality, and subsequently, CRT has been utilized as a tool in the field of education to study racial inequalities for students of color in numerous areas including educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy (Yosso et al., 2004).

Within the context of this study, I found that the AP school culture has possibly fallen victim to a form of endemic racism. It has become commonplace that these courses serve an almost entirely White student population. Colorblind rules do exist providing students the option to enroll in AP courses, but throughout the years, these rules have failed to address the underlining nuances of the school's AP culture of exclusivity. As expressed by students, this culture of exclusivity has been perpetuated through the use of inconsistent recommendation procedures, lack of effective information distribution, and a lack of consistent academic support. In turn, this has constructed and normalized a type of re-segregation within the school.

In alignment with Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) explanation of the intersection of race and property, White students have the overwhelmingly rights to use and enjoyment of school property (i.e., AP classes). Feelings of exclusion have caused some students to refrain from interjecting themselves into these types of environments and may have contributed to some

students placing academic, deficit-oriented views upon themselves. Despite sufficient honors course success and high standardized test scores, some of the African American student participants continued to harbor feelings of inadequacy while, as described by school personnel participants, many White students believe AP classrooms are the appropriate setting for them regardless of their ability levels. Essentially, students, school personnel, and the school community view the AP program as being, virtually, devoid of blackness and a superior learning environment (Martin, 2009).

A fundamental component of CRT and of this study was to provide African Americans students the opportunity and safe space to communicate their perceptions and beliefs with regard to their educational experiences. Understandably, majoritarian groups cannot always easily understand minority prospective. Therefore, it was imperative that students be allowed to use their *voice-of-color* to provide counterstories that critique and analyze possible stereotypes and misconceptions of minorities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). It allows one to realize ways in which they may have been complacent in and/or justified the oppression of others (Delgado, 1989).

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was that the scholarly practitioner is an employee of the school where the participants were selected. As the scholarly practitioner conducting the study, I did not allow bias to impact the data collection or analysis procedures. My personal experiences were bracketed in order eliminate bias and subjectivity and present information authentically, inclusively, and transparently (Creswell, 2013; Brinkmann, 2013).

A second limitation to this study is the parameters by which this study is bound. Findings are limited to the small, purposeful sample size of students and school personnel located within one school within the northeastern regional district of North Carolina. The study was also

designed with the intent of including an equal number of male and female students; however, selection criteria became a barrier limiting the number of male students. Due to the singular study environment, there is a lack of transferability of these findings to other environments. Because school environments and cultures vary, what occurs in one context may not occur in others, and successful strategies in one setting may not be successful in another. Notwithstanding the limitations of case studies, qualitative research may allow for partial generalization and transferability making them valuable in the educational community (Myers, 2000).

The limitations presented did not compromise the findings of the study. As the scholarly practitioner, I recognized the limitations and took safeguards to ensure the validity of study results: triangulation of data, audit trails, member checking, and bracketing.

Recommendations for Practice

For schools to provide solution-driven strategies to alleviate the underrepresentation of African American students in advanced-level courses, several protocols should be established at the district and school levels to facilitate improvements. The following provides a rationale and specific suggestions on how these recommendations can be implemented to improve the process for increased minority participation.

Middle School Level Recommendations

In many instances, students' access to rigorous coursework has much to do with their experiences before they enter high school. Students who start high school as high-achieving are substantially more likely than those who start out as low-achieving to complete advanced-level/honors courses, AP courses, or the full academic course load that sets them on a path to future success (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014). For these reasons, emphasis must be made on the readiness of students to engage in rigorous curricula before entering high school.

As a means to better prepare students for advanced-level, high school curricula, high schools and their feeder middle schools should consider creating a rigorous curriculum infrastructure between them (Flores & Gomez, 2011). As a proactive measure, high school principals need to communicate a vison to attendance-area or feeder middle schools that is comprised of collaborating and developing strategies for generating greater academic success in high school. School administration and core curriculum teachers should engage in curriculum alignment to ensure middle school teachers are aware of and can appropriately aid students in obtaining the necessary academic skills needed for rigorous coursework as they enter high school. Having a more in depth understanding of grade 6 – grade 12 curriculum and performance expectations may also afford middle school teachers better accuracy in their course recommendations for rising 9th grade students.

Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) entrance practices also need to be reevaluated at the middle school level. Students entering high school immediately on an honors/AP track have often been identified as AIG while in elementary school. Ideally, *all* deserving students would be properly identified as AIG during that time; however, African American students continue to be grossly underrepresented in this area (Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2001; Hodges et al., 2018). There needs to be a concentrated effort to better identify possible AIG students and students with high academic potential during middle school. The consideration of student potential as part of the identification process creates a more inclusive model compared to one heavily reliant on test scores that reflect conspicuous achievements. Research suggests incorporating various and/or alternative measures of identification to help discover high ability and potential that may be masked by socioeconomic and cultural factors (Hodges et al., 2018). Fundamentally, enrollment in a gifted program in elementary or middle

school is often a precursor to enrollment in higher-level courses in high school, and appropriate and consistent measures should be taken to ensure underrepresented populations are not denied access to the program. Policies that ignore the importance of student preparation will not close the gaps in AP participation. While we should responsibly expand AP, we must recognize that the ultimate solution to AP participation gaps is closing the preparation gaps before high school (Malkus, 2016).

High School Level Recommendations

The recommendations for practice at the high school level emerged from the results of this study based on the perceptions of students, school personnel, and consideration of enrollment data following targeted recruitment efforts. While these suggestions are recommended for implementation at the high school level, useful data points and/or activities may provide more effective outcomes when combined with middle school collaboration.

While AP classes were created as accommodations for students who excel academically, schools must dismantle the notion that AP and advanced classes are only for the *top students* (Flores & Gomez, 2011). This ideology leaves hard-working, highly motivated average students out of the AP picture, and it prevents greater minority student access to the AP program. It is essential that school administration strive to build an AP school culture (Handwerk et al., 2008) and infrastructure. Individual high schools should employ strategies to foster the equitable identification and participation of African American students in AP courses. There should be aggressive recruitment efforts for incoming 8th graders from feeder schools. Data for these students should be utilized and analyzed before these students enter high school to encourage honors and subsequent AP enrollment. For students already enrolled in high school, teachers and counselors must continue to recruit students who are not currently in advanced classes.

This recruitment requires school administration, counselors, and instructional staff to continue reviewing *multiple* and relevant data points of 10th and 11th grade students to identify capable AP candidates who were not identified earlier or did not establish the necessary academic skills until later in high school. I stress that multiple data points must be considered because, while resources such as the PreACT and the College Board's *AP Potential* can be useful in identifying students for AP enrollment, these assessments may unfairly eliminate possible AP candidates, negatively affect students' beliefs about their ability, and result in them changing their academic plans. More effective recruitment practices also include properly utilizing the school's course registration software to recommend students for AP courses and engaging in conversations with students informing them and/or reaffirming why they are suited for advanced-level curricula.

I also recommend that an important component of a school's AP infrastructure involve investing in instructor and school counselor diversity. Just as it is important for students to see themselves represented in the class makeup, Black students should also see themselves represented in the AP teaching and counseling staff. Students may then be more likely to enroll in advanced-level courses when school personnel have a better understanding of their cultural perspectives and experiences. Research also shows that Black educators are more likely to hold Black students to high expectations and identify them for advanced opportunities. This plays a substantial role in whether or not Black students are recommended for AIG, pre-requisite (honors) courses, and AP courses (Patrick et al., 2020).

There need to be processes created to ensure the proper support of students in AP classes. A large component of this support is ensuring minority students in AP courses have adequate peer support. All efforts should be made to ensure a reasonable number of same-race peers are enrolled in AP courses together. This will likely diminish underrepresented groups' feelings of

social isolation and alienation. Additional support examples may include providing students with auxiliary time in their schedule to receive teacher support or complete assignments.

The last recommendation is for high schools and school districts to more effectively share information with students and parents on the benefits of and how to access advanced courses. Study data overwhelming indicated school personnel viewed a lack of parental knowledge and support as considerable barriers to African American AP enrollment. It is recommended that schools host information sessions targeted to minority parents and students. To mitigate the possibility of poor event attendance, efforts should be made to individually contact and invite parents to these events. While this may be time consuming, this may be a mandatory step in order to meaningfully engage parents. Parents, especially those unfamiliar with AP and the post-secondary educational system, need to be familiar with the school's AP program and the commitment that both students and parents need to make (Flore & Gomez, 2011; Bromberg & Theokas, 2014).

Most importantly, as demonstrated in this particular study (i.e., RISE), educators must embrace utilizing a race-conscience, as opposed to a colorblind, approach when creating systems of support for marginalized students. This is likely the only way to generate and sustain meaningful change.

Recommendations for Future Research

Focus of practice data and findings of this study support the decades of existing literature detailing the continued AP enrollment disparities of African American students; however, there is a lack of research on interventions used to reduce these disparities. Further, there is a lack of research detailing enrollment decisions of African American and other minority student groups when they are the school population majority *and* have an abundant number of AP course

offerings. Normally, these two variables are inversely proportional (Barnard-Bark et al., 2011). While schools across the U.S. have continued to expand AP access through course offerings, studies have shown that merely increasing the number of AP course offerings does little, if anything, to decrease the enrollment disparity for African American students (Darity et al., 2001; Handwerk et al., 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004a; Malkus, 2016). As an extension of this study, the scope could be broadened to include all high schools within the school district. Insights and perspectives provided by students and school personnel attending these schools may present valuable information on the ways in which varying school size, location, demographics, and AP course offerings affect experiences, perceptions, and enrollment and recruitment improvement strategies. Analysis could be made to identify successful strategies employed within systematic support systems and provide guidance in how to replicate those systems.

An additional area of future research could include examining the perspectives of additional minority student groups. As the scholarly practitioner operated within a school consisting of a majority African American population, the natural and most pressing place to begin was with the voices of Black students; however, African American students are not the only group affected by advanced course enrollment disparities.

As the study concluded, a supplementary area of inquiry was that of White student perspectives. Just as White school personnel in the study had to examine themselves and their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs on the possible presence of overt and/or covert racism within the school, it may benefit White students to participate in a similar examination.

Conclusion

The purpose of this single-case study was to examine and improve a school's recruitment structure for advanced level courses and better understand factors that African American students in that school attributed to their lack of participation in Advanced Placement courses. The focus of practice was framed around questions of equity and social justice with the goal and examining and providing possible solutions to the particular phenomenon under study. Some present this type of research as an important and practical way to engage educators, empowering them to design effective practices and become informants to scholars and policy makers regarding critical issues in the field (Rust, 2009). The underpinnings of Critical Race Theory were utilized as a framework to guide the focus of practice as CRT has been used an explanatory tool in acknowledging the sustained inequity experienced by minority groups in various areas of the educational realm (Parker et al., 1999).

This study concluded that African American students enrolled in advanced-level courses often experience feelings of isolation and marginalization within these classrooms. For students choosing to participate in AP courses, their desire to achieve outweighed their need for social comfort. School personnel acknowledged they have influence on students' enrollment decisions but largely attributed enrollment disparities to a lack of familial support. Enrollment data affirmed that schools becoming intentional in their recruitment and recommendation practices and creating systems of support can have a positive effect on minority, advanced-course enrollment. This study recommends that better instructional relationships be built between feeder-middle schools and high schools to better prepare and engage students in advanced-level curricula before entering high school. Concurrently, it is imperative that high schools employ

strategies to foster the equitable identification and participation of African American students in honors and AP courses.

As recommendations for future research suggests, this focus of practice is one that requires continuing studies. More empirical research is needed to explore effective recruitment and academic support structures for underrepresented populations. Conclusively, until schools recognize the enrollment disparities of minority students in advanced-level courses, inspect the effect of colorblind policies and ideologies, *and* develop race-conscience systems and supports to engage and assist students in accessing this type of curriculum, these disparities will endure.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Nydra Jones
CC: Marjorie Ringler
Date: 11/19/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-002273
Equity and Advanced Placement

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 11/18/2021. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6,7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;

2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);

3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;

4. Submission of a final report application to the UMICRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and

5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Assent Form_Jones.docx	Consent Forms
Informed Consent_Jones.doc	Consent Forms
Interview Protocols.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Nydra Jones Proposal .pdf	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Parental Permission Consent Form_Jones.docx	Consent Forms
Permission to Access Data.pdf	Dataset Use Approval/Permission
Recruitment Script for Students.docx	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Recruitment Script for Teachers and Guidance Counselors.docx	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Student Informed Consent (18+)_Jones.doc	Consent Forms

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: STAFF PERSONNEL INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Equity and Advanced Placement: Examining a School-Based Initiative to Remove Enrollment Barriers for African American Students

Principal Investigator: Nydra S. Jones
Institution, Department or Division: Department of Educational Leadership
Address: [redacted]
Telephone #: [redacted]
Study Coordinator: Dr. Marjorie Ringler
Telephone #: [redacted]

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to provide school personnel a reasonable action plan for improving diversity within Advanced Placement classes in the school. You are being invited to take part in this research because of your proximity to students in advanced level courses and/or your ability to affect the course enrollment of these students. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn methods to better recruit, retain, and support African American students in AP courses.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about ___21____ people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than one would experience in their daily activities. The researcher will use pseudonyms and keep all information collected confidential. The interview protocol contains questions that pertain to sensitive issues for some. Should there be any questions in the interview that make you uncomfortable, you are not required to respond to them.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted [redacted] High School. You will need to come [redacted] High School 2 times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 1.5 hours over the next 3 months.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with me. Once I have transcribed and discovered themes within the student interview transcripts, you will also be asked to participate in a focus group with other school personnel participants to review this anonymous, student interview data.

- Individual interviews will not exceed 40 minutes.
- Focus group session will not exceed 30 minutes.
- I will be the only person who has access to the interview recording. Your identity will be protected. For audit purposes, I will maintain and safeguard documentation of this research project for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation will be destroyed.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The sponsors of this study
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

Data will be kept for 3 years following the completion of the research study. Physical data will be kept securely locked in the researcher's home office. Any electronic data will be password protected to secure private information.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop, and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at [redacted] (days, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?
Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future studies.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	**Signature**	**Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	**Signature**	**Date**

APPENDIX C: STUDENT PARTICPANT ASSE

Assent Form

Things You Should Know Before You Agree To Take Part in this Research

IRB Study #_____

Title of Study: Equity and Advanced Placement: Examining a School-Based Initiative to Remove Enrollment Barriers for African American Students

Person in charge of study: Nydra S. Jones
Where they work: [redacted]

Study contact phone number: [redacted]
Study contact E-mail Address: [redacted]

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to examine what factors influence students' course enrollment decisions and determine what processes can be put in place at the school-level to encourage and improve African American, Advanced Placement enrollment.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Why are you doing this research study?
The reason for doing this research is to provide school personnel a reasonable action plan for improving diversity within AP classes at the school.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?
I am asking you to take part in this research because the information you may be able to provide will be useful in improving supports that students receive in their course selection process and in their course-taking process.

How many people will take part in this study?
If you decide to be in this research, you will be one of about 21 people taking part in it.

What will happen during this study?

- I will access your PowerSchool data (demographics, historical grades, course registration, GPA, and standardized test scores).
- You will be interviewed (*asked a series of open-ended questions*) about your perceptions and experiences related to advanced level (Honors/AP) courses.
- Interviews will be audio recorded. I will place these recordings in locked storage during the research process.
- Interviews will not exceed 30 minutes.
- Your identification will remain confidential.

- Clarifying and/or follow-up questions during the data analysis may be needed.
- The timeframe for participation is the Fall Semester of 2021.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ OK to record me during the study

_____ Not OK to record me during the study

This study will take place at [redacted] High School and will last one academic school year (2021-2022).

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

The data collected from this study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, no participants will be identified by name.

What are the good things that might happen?

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in research. These are called "benefits." The benefits to you of being in this study is that you may benefit from improved methods to help more students benefit from AP courses.

What are the bad things that might happen?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study, you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

_____ _____

Sign your name here if you want to be in the study Date

_____

Print your name here if you want to be in the study

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

APPENDIX D: PARENTAL CONSENT

Parental Legal Guardian
Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Equity and Advanced Placement: Examining a School-Based Initiative to Remove Enrollment Barriers for African American Students

Principal Investigator: Nydra S. Jones
Institution, Department or Division: Department of Educational Leadership
Address: [redacted]
Telephone #: [redacted]
Study Coordinator: Dr. Marjorie Ringler
Telephone #: [redacted]

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to provide school personnel a reasonable action plan for improving diversity within Advanced Placement classes in the school Your child is being invited to take part in this research because your child may be able to provide valuable information to aid in improving supports that students receive in their course selection process and in their course-taking process. The decision for your child to take part in this research will also depend upon whether your child wants to participate. By doing this research, we hope to learn methods to better diversify advanced level courses in the school.

If you and your child agree for him/her to volunteer for this research, your child will be one of about 21 people to do so.

Are there reasons my child should not take part in this research?

There are no anticipated risks associated with your child's participation in the study. If the student desires, they may terminate their participation in the research at any time.

What other choices do I have if my child does not take part in this research?

Your child can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at [redacted] High School in a school conference room. The total amount of time your child will be asked to volunteer for this study is 30 minutes.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will be asked to participate in an interview in which they will be asked a series of open-ended questions centered on their experiences in advanced level courses and their experiences with course registration.

- Interviews will be audio recorded. I will place these recordings in locked storage during the research process.
- Interviews will not exceed 30 minutes.

- Student identification will remain confidential.
- Clarifying and/or follow-up questions during the data analysis may be needed.
- The timeframe for participation is the Fall Semester of 2021.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if your child will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to your child but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will my child be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you or your child for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me anything for my child to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that your child took part in this research and may see information about your child that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your child's private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your child's welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify your child.

How will you keep the information you collect about my child secure? How long will you keep it?
Data will be kept for 3 years following the completion of the research study. Physical data will be kept securely locked in the researcher's home office. Any electronic data will be password protected to secure private information. Following this 3 year period, all data will be destroyed.

What if my child decides he/she doesn't want to continue in this research?
Your child can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if he/she stops and he/she will not be criticized. Your child will not lose any benefits that he/she would normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at [redacted] (days, between 9:00 am – 4:00 pm).

If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?
I serve as an assistant principal of your child's school while also serving as the principal investigator of this study. This disclosure is made so that you can decide it this relationship will affect your willingness to allow your child to participate in this study. Additionally, I will access your child's PowerSchool data (demographics, historical grades, course registration, GPA, and standardized test scores). Your child's information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future studies.

I have decided my child can take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that my child can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, my child is not giving up any of his/her rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____

Parent's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

APPENDIX E: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
AP Student

Thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview today. This interview is being conducted to gain insight into why many African American students enrolled at this school do not participate in Advanced Placement courses. As you answer the questions, please respond openly and honestly. You were given an assent form to sign that gave you permission to be interviewed. This interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous in the reporting. No grades or instructional time will be affected by your involvement in this study.

1. Describe the steps you take when going through the registration process. How do you determine what classes you will take?
    a. Describe the guidance you receive from teachers.
    b. Describe the guidance you receive from counselors.
    c. Describe the guidance you receive from family members.

2. Have you ever been recommended or encouraged to enroll in an AP course by a teacher or counselor? What effect did this have on your registration decisions? Would you be more likely to take an AP course if you had been recommended?

3. Describe the type of student most likely to take an AP class in this school?

4. Do you know of any specific criteria needed to enroll in an AP course? How did you become aware of the criteria?

5. Have you and/or your parent ever received information about AP courses? If yes, when and through what communication method(s)? Describe the discussion between you and your parent(s).

6. In your opinion, what are any benefits to enrolling in AP courses?

7. Why do you believe there are so few African American students enrolled in Advanced Placement in this school?

8. How do you think your Honors and AP teachers view African American students?

9. What ideas and suggestions would you give school administrators, counselors, and teachers that would help encourage AA students to enroll in AP courses?

10. Are you aware of the instructors for AP courses in this school? What are your views of these teachers?

11. Do you believe the staff at this school do enough to increase the number of African American students in AP courses? Why or why not?

12. If AP courses were 50% AA and 50% White enrollment (or larger that 50% AA enrollment), describe the effect you believe that may have on you and the school.

13. a. How would you describe your overall academic and social experience in your AP course(s)? Have you faced any academic and/or social challenges?

    b. How would you describe your overall academic and social experience in your Honors course(s)? Have you faced any academic and/or social challenges?

14. How did/will your Honors course(s) affect your decision to enroll in AP?

15. Do you plan to enroll in any College and Career Promise (Community College) courses? If yes, explain your decision.

16. In as much detail as you can, describe the middle school registration process when registering for high school classes.
    a. Were you encouraged to enroll in any Honors courses for high school? If yes, by whom?
    b. As you review this process, can you describe additional supports that may have benefited you during the registration process?

17. In as much detail as you can, describe your experience in being a part of the school's AP cohort (RISE). Were there any benefits?

18. Do you have any other thoughts or beliefs you would like to contribute to this topic?

APPENDIX F: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Non-AP Student

Thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview today. This interview is being conducted to gain insight into why many African American students enrolled at this school do not participate in Advanced Placement courses. As you answer the questions, please respond openly and honestly. You were given an assent form to sign that gave you permission to be interviewed. This interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous in the reporting. No grades or instructional time will be affected by your involvement in this study.

1. Describe the steps you take when going through the registration process. How do you determine what classes you will take?
    a. Describe the guidance you receive from teachers.
    b. Describe the guidance you receive from counselors.
    c. Describe the guidance you receive from family members.

2. Have you ever been recommended or encouraged to enroll in an AP course by a teacher or counselor? What effect did this have on your registration decisions? Would you be more likely to take an AP course if you had been recommended?

3. Describe the type of student most likely to take an AP class in this school?

4. Do you know of any specific criteria needed to enroll in an AP course? How did you become aware of the criteria?

5. Have you and/or your parent ever received information about AP courses? If yes, when and through what communication method(s)? Describe the discussion between you and your parent(s).

6. In your opinion, what are any benefits to enrolling in AP courses?

7. Why do you believe there are so few African American students enrolled in Advanced Placement in this school?

8. How do you think your Honors and AP teachers view African American students?

9. What ideas and suggestions would you give school administrators, counselors, and teachers that would help encourage AA students to enroll in AP courses?

10. Are you aware of the instructors for AP courses in this school? What are your views of these teachers?

11. Do you believe the staff at this school do enough to increase the number of African American students in AP courses? Why or why not?

12. If AP courses were 50% AA and 50% White enrollment (or larger that 50% AA enrollment), describe the effect you believe that may have on you and the school.

13. How would you describe your overall academic and social experience in your Honors course(s)? Have you faced any academic and/or social challenges?

14. How did/will your Honors course(s) affect your decision to enroll in AP?

15. Do you plan to enroll in any College and Career Promise (Pitt Community College) courses? If yes, explain your decision.

16. In as much detail as you can, describe the middle school registration process when registering for high school classes.
    a. Were you encouraged to enroll in any Honors courses for high school? If yes, by whom?
    b. As you review this process, can you describe additional supports that may have benefited you during the registration process?

17. Do you have any other thoughts or beliefs you would like to contribute to this topic?

APPENDIX G: HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview today. This interview is being conducted to gain insight into your school's Advanced Placement Program. As you answer the questions, please respond openly and honestly. This interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous in the reporting.

1. Describe the type of student most likely to take an AP class?

2. In what way, if any, should the low enrollment of African American students in AP courses be addressed?

3. In your experience as an AP teacher, are students enrolled in your class typically suited for the academic rigor of an AP course?
    a. If not, how do you address this? What types of supports are provided?

4. In your course, have African American students typically fared well? What do you believe contributes to their success or failure?

5. Who or what do you feel has the greatest influence on whether or not African American students participate in the AP program? Explain.

6. Explain the AP recommendation and screening process for the school and your particular subject area?
    a. Would you amend this process or criteria?

7. How do school staff influence whether or not a student chooses to participate in an AP class?

8. What role do you think peers play in recruiting and retaining AA students in AP courses?

9. In what ways do you solicit enrollment for your particular AP course?

10. How would you describe the overall classroom culture in your AP class? How would a substantial increase in A.A. students alter this culture?

11. What strategies are in place in the school to promote AP participation?
    a. Are these strategies effective?
    b. What would you change or implement?
12. How is the AP Program curriculum, course selection, and placement information communicated to students and families?

13. Have you ever encouraged an African American student to take an AP course?
    a. If yes, what criteria did you feel warranted your encouragement, and how many times would you estimate you have done this?

b. What was the student's response?

14. Have students who met criteria to enroll in your AP subject area, chosen to enroll in a comparable community college course instead?
    a. If yes, why do you believe the student(s) chose to do this?

15. Do you believe this school has a larger population of African American students that could enroll and be successful in AP courses?

16. Can you describe any possible benefits of increasing African American AP enrollment in this school?

17. Can you describe any possible detriments of increasing African American AP enrollment in this school?

18. Do you believe it is any specific person's or position's responsibility to increase African American AP enrollment? Explain.

19. Would you describe enrollment in an AP course as a type of academic privilege? If yes, describe the perceived privilege.

20. Do you have any other thoughts or beliefs you would like to contribute to this topic?

APPENDIX H: HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview today. This interview is being conducted to gain insight into your school's Advanced Placement Program. As you answer the questions, please respond openly and honestly. This interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous in the reporting.

1. Describe the type of student most likely to take an AP class?

2. In what way, if any, should the low enrollment of African American students in AP courses be addressed?

3. Who or what do you feel has the greatest influence on whether or not African American students participate in the AP program? Explain.

4. Explain the AP recommendation and screening process for the school.
    a. Would you amend this process or criteria?

5. How do school staff influence whether or not a student chooses to participate in an AP class?

6. How do you recruit African American students in AP classes?

7. What strategies are in place in the school to promote AP participation?
    a. Are these strategies effective?
    b. What would you change or implement?
8. How is the AP Program curriculum, course selection, and placement information communicated to students and families?

9. Have you ever encouraged an African American student to take an AP course?
    a. If yes, what criteria did you feel warranted your encouragement, and how many times would you estimate you have done this?
    b. What was the student's response?

10. Have students who met criteria to enroll in an AP course chosen to enroll in a comparable community college course instead?
    a. If yes, why do you believe the student(s) chose to do this?

11. Do you believe this school has a larger population of African American students that could enroll and be successful in AP courses?

12. Can you describe any possible benefits of increasing African American AP enrollment in this school?

13. Can you describe any possible detriments of increasing African American AP enrollment in this school?

14. Do you believe it is any specific person's or position's responsibility to increase African American AP enrollment?

15. Would you describe enrollment in an AP course as a type of academic privilege? If yes, describe the perceived privilege.

16. Do you have any other thoughts or beliefs you would like to contribute to this topic?

APPENDIX I: MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to meet for this interview today. This interview is being conducted to gain insight into the role middle school teachers and counselors have on African American Honors/AP high school enrollment. As you answer the questions, please respond openly and honestly. This interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous in the reporting.

1. What are the racial demographics of this school's AIG program?

2. What is this school's AIG identification process?

3. During the 9th grade class registration process, what are the procedures for enrolling students into Honors or Advanced Placement courses?

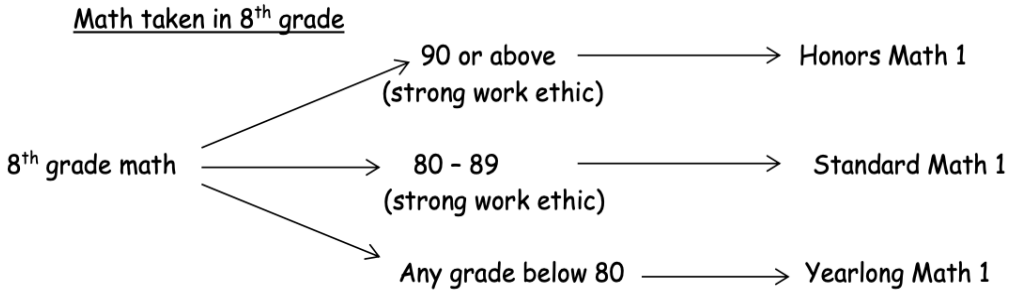
4. As a school counselor, do you make registration recommendations? What criteria is used?

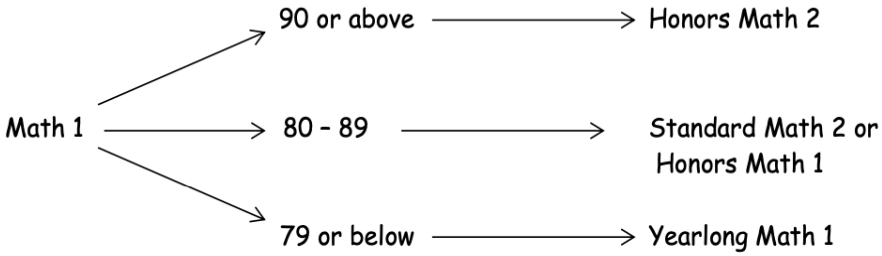
5. What criteria do 8th grade teachers use during the high school registration process?

6. Are students and parents given information about core content courses and Honors/AP courses before registering for high school courses?

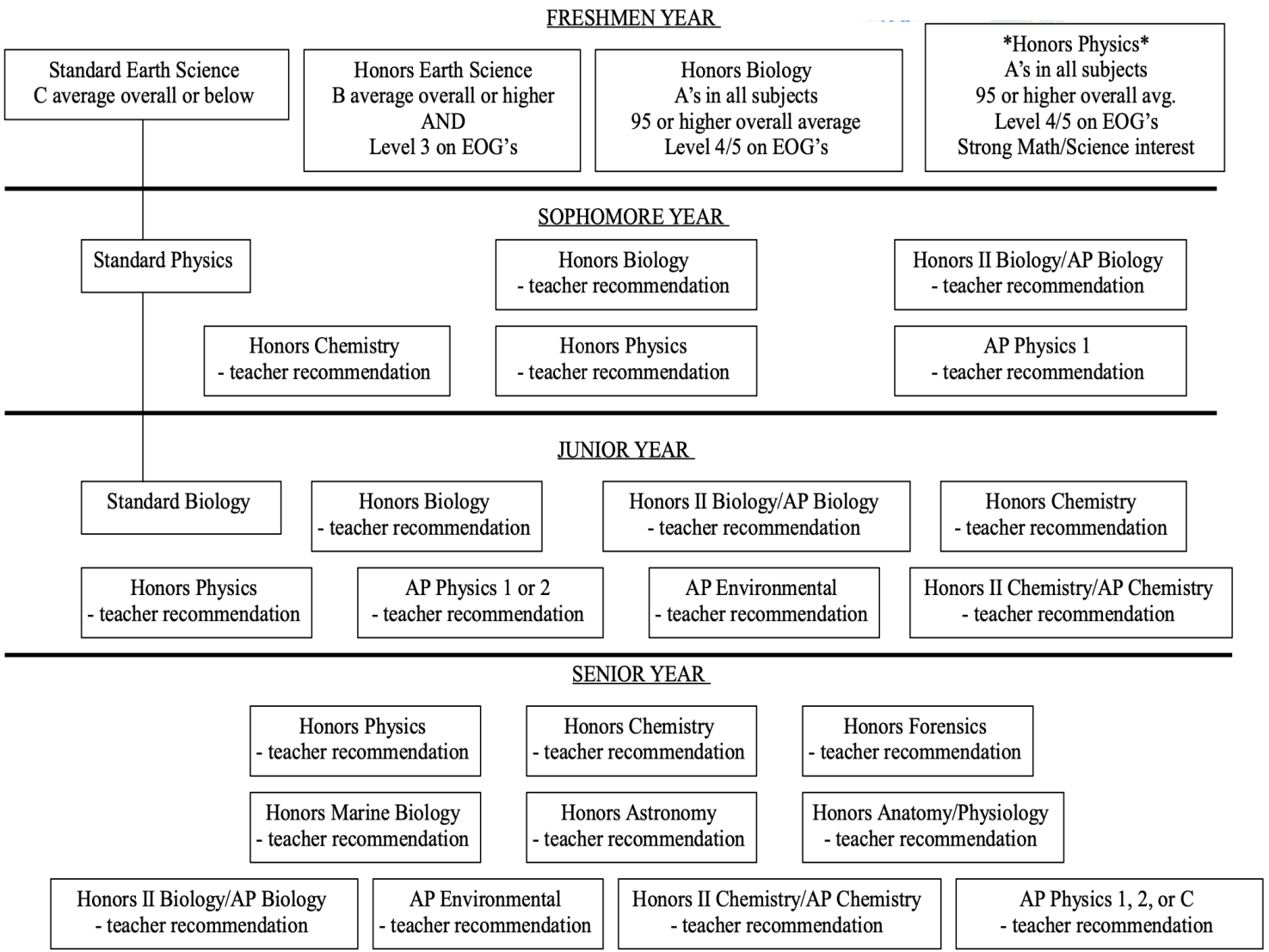
7. Do you believe more actions should be taken at the middle school level to identify and recruit students into the AIG program? If yes, what would you suggest?

APPENDIX J: MATH RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES





Science Course Pathways



English Department

Mandatory Courses Offered

Standard English I

This is for students who earned a **C+ or lower** in 8th grade ELA and may have difficulty with written expression.

Honors English I

This is for students who earned an **A or B** in 8th grade ELA, demonstrate efficacy in writing for personal expression, and capably articulate critical thinking skills.

Paideia English I – *Unique to* [redacted]

This is for students who earned a **C or higher** in 8th grade ELA, can construct compete sentences / paragraphs, enjoy working in collaborative teams, and have a reading **level 2** or higher. The course is great for "on the bubble" students who, with scaffolded instruction, can achieve higher growth and proficiency levels.

*Students who have already completed World History are **NOT** eligible for this course.*

Honors Paideia English I – *Unique to* [redacted]

This is for students who earned an **A or B** in 8th grade ELA, demonstrate efficacy in writing for personal expression, enjoy working in collaborative teams, and capably articulate critical thinking skills. The course offers a positive environment for peer-led instruction and group seminars.

*Students who have already completed World History are **NOT** eligible for this course.*

Electives Available to Incoming Freshmen (as well as upperclassmen)

Debate (*Standard / Honors*)
Students in this course will debate propositions of value and policy based upon various current events. Time will be spent researching and organizing persuasive arguments to be presented orally as well as written. Active participation and engagement with current events including interaction with various forms of media and texts will be part of the researching process. Students will present team debates as well as individual debates. The debate course is divided into three units: argumentation skills and debate process, policy debate, and value debate. Honors classes are distinguished by the rigor of work and depth of study rather than the quantity of work.

Creative Writing (*Standard / Honors*)
The purpose of this class is to enhance and emphasize abstract thinking while promoting the writing process. Each student will be expected to write, edit, revise, and present work in various modes. Instruction will include poetry, short story, nonfiction, and various readings.

Journalism (*Standard for Journalism I: Application is required.)*
This course focuses on the basic elements of journalistic writing and layout. Students who elect to take the course should be genuinely interested in developing journalistic skills and becoming an active member of the school's publication staff. Student responsibilities include selling advertising, conducting interviews, writing stories, designing pages, proofreading copy, and distributing the newspaper.

Recommended Summer Reading List

The Andromeda Strain written by Michael Crichton

A Separate Peace written by John Knowles

Cold Sassy Tree written by Olive Ann Burns

Great Expectations written by Charles Dickens

In the Time of Butterflies written by Julia Alvarez

Walking Across Egypt written by Clyde Edgerton

Three Cups of Tea written by Mortenson & Relin

Need More Information?
Contact: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

Social Studies Recommendations:

	On Level Student Below 80 in on level	Student B below 85 but a good work ethic in Standard	Student 85+ in 8th Grade History	Strong students without the World History Credit - strong work ethic - A in 8th grade History	Successful in World History in 8th Grade 85+
9th	Standard World History	Paideia World or Honors Paideia World or Honors World History - if great work ethic	Honors Paideia World or Honors World History	AP World	Honors Civics or AP Government

Additional Electives to take: (Grade level)	
Standard or Honors African American Studies (9-12) Current Events (9-12) Standard or Honors Law and Justice (10-12) Standard or Honors Psychology (9-12) Standard or Honors Sociology (9-12) Sports History (9-12)	AP Comparative Government (10-12) AP European History (10-12) AP Human Geography (9-12) AP Macroeconomics (10-12) AP Microeconomics (10-12) AP Psychology (9-12) AP US Government (9-12) AP World History (9-12)

APPENDIX N: RISE INVITATION LETTER

Dear _____ and Parent/Guardian,

We would like to invite you to be a part of the 2020-2021 R******* Integrating Support in Education cohort (RISE Cohort). After reviewing past EOG, EOC, report cards, teacher feedback, and Pre-ACT data we have selected a cohort of current 9th and 10th grade students that exhibit the ability, potential, and work ethic to work above their current course level in one or more classes.

The goal of the cohort is to increase diversity in higher level courses and better support students transitioning to higher level courses. The cohort will work together with faculty leaders to build on skills and foster group support in and outside the classroom. The cohort will meet together three times this spring and twice a month next school year during Refresh. You will have several members of the cohort in at least one of your classes.

We would like to offer your student this program that will provide the following:

- Peer support in the cohort in and out of the classroom setting
- Provide information about opportunities like scholarships or programs, as well as support to take advantage of opportunities
- Support with study habits
- Curriculum planning
- Personalized registration that is focused on student and parent choice
- College and career planning
- Parent opportunities for college planning and information session

Next Steps:

1. Student Refresh meeting to discuss the program: **Monday February 17th Block B** in the Lecture Hall (students will be added to the session).
2. Parent information meeting during Curriculum Night **Thursday February 27th at 7pm** in the Lecture Hall.
3. Student Refresh meeting for registration help for the 2020-2021 school year - **Monday March 2nd B Block** in the Lecture Hall.

Sincerely,

Mrs. [redacted]
Mr. [redacted]
Ms. Nydra Jones
Mrs. [redacted]
Mr. [redacted]
Mr. [redacted]