ABSTRACT

Tammy R. Boone, INCREASING MINORITY PARTICIPATION IN ADVANCED PROGRAMS AND CLASSES IN A RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT (Under the direction of Dr. Karen Jones). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2021.

Does allowing all students equal access to advanced classes have a direct impact on student achievement? The answer is one that can only be provided by engaging in the appropriate research that will allow the scholarly practitioner to examine a problem of practice that encompasses the question within the study. According to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED model), a problem of practice is defined as a "persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes" (The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2019). Therefore, as educators, there is a constant need to collaborate with other educators to be aware of the academic needs of students as well as make curricula decisions that affect students. Moreover, it is important to constantly review the needs and challenges faced daily with providing equal educational opportunities for all students in order to follow the CPED model. In order to effectively provide educational opportunities for all students, educators should focus their attention on improving understanding, experiences and outcomes for all students to further delineate the problem.

INCREASING MINORITY ENROLLMENT IN ADVANCED CLASSES

IN A RURAL NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Tammy R. Boone

May, 2021

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Tammy R. Boone

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION: _____

Karen D. Jones, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____

Marjorie Ringler, EdD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____

Travis Lewis, EdD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____

Shawn Wilson, EdD

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

_____

Marjorie Ringler, EdD

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

_____

Paul Gemperline, PhD

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Mildred and George Riddick, who taught me that you don't have to be defined by your circumstances; instead, you have the ability to be a game changer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of numerous people.

I would like to thank God first of all for being my Heavenly Father and for giving me the strength to go through this process. "I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me." Philippians4:13

To my dissertation Chair, Dr. Karen Jones, thank you for being patient with me and for always showing a willingness to support and listen to me. I appreciate your kind spirit and your genuine desire to help others. I am also grateful for the open and honest conversations we have engaged in. Your support and kindness will never be forgotten.

To my professor, Dr. Travis Lewis, thank you for being a "cheerleader" for me and for not allowing me to quit the many times I wanted to. Your encouragement will always be appreciated as well as your positive attitude.

To Dr. Shawn Wilson, thank you for your unwavering support through this process. You are a great colleague and friend and I appreciate you.

To my mother Yvonne, thank you for showing me what it means to persevere, even after having a life-changing occurrence. Although you are not able to move and do the things you used to do, I know you still have the heart to do. I love you!

To my sons Brandall and Nathan, thank you for always believing that your mom could do anything. Just because you said it, I believed it. I love you both more than you will ever know.

To my daughter Asha, thank you for being you. Thank you for being supportive and for encouraging me when I wanted to give up. Believe it or not, you have been an inspiration to me because you have such a determined spirit and you never accept defeat; instead, you kick into the

next gear and move forward. You have achieved so much at such a young age and I know that the best is yet to come. I love you baby girl more than you will ever know.

Finally to my husband Jimmy, thank you for your patience and understanding through this process. Thank you for always cooking really good food and telling jokes when I needed a good laugh and thank you for your encouragement and love. I love you to life!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Does allowing all students equal access to advanced classes have a direct impact on student achievement? The answer is one that can only be provided by engaging in the appropriate research that will allow the scholarly practitioner to examine a problem of practice that encompasses the question within the study. According to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED model), a problem of practice is defined as a "persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes" (The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2019). Therefore, as educators, there is a constant need to collaborate with other educators to be aware of the academic needs of students as well as make curricula decisions that affect students. Moreover, it is important to constantly review the needs and challenges faced daily with providing equal educational opportunities for all students in order to follow the CPED model. In order to effectively provide educational opportunities for all students, educators should focus their attention on improving understandings, experiences and outcomes for all students to further delineate the problem.

The problem of practice being addressed in this study is to increase minority student enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school. The study is a problem of practice because it is persistent, contextualized, and it addresses a specific area of study. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of this study will have a positive impact on how barriers are broken and addressed in rural high schools in North Carolina. The study will aid in producing a plan to help increase minority enrollment in advanced classes as well as understand the culture of the environment. There is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes and this practice seems to be occurring year after year with no resolve (Dervarics, 2011).

Realizing that there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes signifies the need to gain necessary information to support the issue. A report from College Board revealed that "African American, Latino, and low income students who graduated from North Carolina high schools in 2013 enrolled in AP classes at lower rates than did their White peers and were less likely to receive a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam" (Hanover Research, 2015).

Research Organization

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the Problem of Practice; Chapter 2 consists of a thorough review of the literature relative to increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural high school; Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology used for the study; Chapter 4 includes a review of the results in relation to the research questions and hypotheses of the study; and Chapter 5 concludes the study with a thorough discussion of the findings, implications of the results, and recommendations for further research.

Background of the Problem

Frederick Douglass was quoted in 22 Frederick Douglass Quotes to Make You Fight to Stop Ignorance (Medrut, 2018, p. 4), as saying "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." With almost 30 years of experience in public education, as an English teacher and administrator, I have worked with many students who displayed a tremendous of academic talent. Yet, those same students were always enrolled in regular courses throughout high school. Furthermore, I have witnessed some of those same students graduate from high school, go to college and engage in careers such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, pharmacists and engineers. The mind blowing thing for me is that the students who I have seen become very successful were never enrolled in advanced classes. Currently, I serve as Assistant Superintendent in my school

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district and I see same trend occurring where students have the academic ability to enroll in an honors class but they do not which causes me to believe there is an achievement gap present among students

Education is a civil right through which each child can maximize his or her potential, thus representing the definition of equity (National School Board Association [NSBA], 2019). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (History.com, 2019). The landmark decision declared that maintaining separate educational facilities for Black and White children was illegal and unequal. Furthermore, when equal educational opportunities are not provided to all students, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka continues to live and thrive. Additionally, McFadden v. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46 addresses intentional discriminatory practices against Hispanics and Black students in their gifted programs (Ford, 2014). With the lack of minority enrollment in advanced classes, discriminatory practices similar to those displayed in McFadden v. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46 continue to progress.

During the 1960s Civil Rights Era, individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall and the Little Rock Nine which consisted of nine African American students who attempted to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, fought daily to integrate schools in order to provide African-American children with the opportunity to receive an education that would be equal to all students (Cook, 2015). Many individuals felt the need to partake in the movement because it was morally wrong to deny any race of individuals the opportunity to receive a quality education. The pioneers who fought for civil rights helped to advance the cause in many ways; therefore, to see injustice or any form of unfair treatment still occurring in society should cause individuals to desire change.

Day in and day out, educators are faced with the reality that minority students are absent from the student rosters in advanced classes and the awareness of the problem is present, yet, strategies have not been put in place to address the looming concern (Sablich, 2016). The traditional classroom in today's society should be filled with a mixture of students; however, it appears that the pendulum continues to swing more to the side of Caucasian students. According to Diane Rado (2010), "honors classes dominated by White students have been common in Illinois and across the nation." Educators should recognize that students are different and possess various learning styles. If equity is not practiced within class enrollment procedures, there is no awareness present of whether all students can achieve or not. "Teachers cannot meaningfully support their students if they do not understand their needs and what they are experiencing in and out of the classroom" (Duarte, 2019). As educators, a top priority should be to provide equitable opportunities to all students as well as ensure a well-rounded education for all students. Students need to work to their full potential but many times, educators have to serve as advocates to help students realize the untapped potential. When reviewing student enrollment numbers for advanced classes at Pride County High School in Pride County, North Carolina, it does not appear that the playing field is level for all students. For example, the Academically Gifted Program for grades nine through 12 reflects enrollment numbers of 18 White and five Black students. Additionally, when reviewing advanced class enrollment numbers, Chemistry Honors was comprised of 30 Caucasian students, 11 Black students and one Hispanic student. Educational equity and social justice means that equal educational opportunities are being provided for all students. If the problem continues to exist such as the one stated above and nothing is done to change it, the same type of segregation that individuals such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., worked tirelessly to change during the civil rights era will continue. "The

acknowledgement by the U.S. government that segregation is alive and well in American public schools came in an announcement of an agreement with one New Jersey school district over a controversial practice known as tracking which designates students for separate educational paths based on their academic performance as teens or younger" (Kohli, 2014a, p.2).

The achievement gap in advanced courses reflects a lack of cognitive skill building within children that starts before they enter kindergarten (Quinton & National Journal, 2014). "When children come to school with apparent academic gaps that are not addressed, the problem will continue to perpetuate and increase" (Cook, 2015). As students enter into the school setting, it is important for educators to use different types of formative assessments to identify academic gaps present and provide a baseline to focus individual instruction that will build both academic and cognitive skills. Advanced classes tend to offer more rigorous instruction for students to engage their critical thinking skills, therefore, the most prominent enrollment will come from students who have engaged in advanced classes before. Allowing former students to continue taking advanced classes is one way to identify students; however, an underrepresented population of students may still exist who are absent from the advanced class roster. Disparities exist in course offerings causing students of color to have fewer opportunities to challenge themselves with more difficult courses (Cook, 2015). In seventh and eighth grade, Black students in the United States comprise 16% of enrollment but account for only 10% of students taking Algebra I and 9% passing the course (Cook, 2015). While nearly one in five White students took Calculus in high school, one in 15 Black students did (Cook, 2015). Fewer Black students have access to courses such as Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Calculus, Biology, Chemistry and Physics and are underrepresented in gifted and talented courses (Cook, 2015). "Public schools have a responsibility to provide equitable access and ensure that all students have the knowledge

and skills they need to succeed in a rapidly changing global society regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or ethnic background" (Center for Public Education [CPE], 2016, p. 2).

In order to adequately address the problem of a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes at Pride High School, a review of student enrollment data was done through the use of Powerschool. Powerschool is a web based student information system that allows parents access to the parent portal to ascertain information such as student grades, assignments, attendance, student transcripts, and course registration. It also stores and manages student data that are helpful for enrollment into classes. Additional data used included End of Course tests and End of Grade tests, which measure students knowledge of content related concepts retained and learned throughout the school year. End of Course tests are required by North Carolina for all students in grades 9 through 12 in math and English. End of Grade tests are also required by North Carolina for all students in grades 3 through 8 in math, English and science. While reviewing district data in the form of classroom observations, class rosters, student interviews, student test scores, academically and intellectually gifted documentation, and a five year analysis of the student data that includes a disaggregation by subgroups, for a North Carolina high school, it was revealed that there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced courses. Presently, in Pride County Schools, there is a total enrollment of 1,583 students. That number represents demographics that illustrate enrollment numbers of 959 White students, 462 Black students, 48 Hispanic, 107 Multi-Race, 5 American Indian, 1 Asian, and 1 Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (see Table 1).

Table 1

Pride County Schools Student Ethnicity Data

Ethnicity	Enrollment	Percentage of Students
Hispanic	48	3%
Asian	1	0.0006%
African American	462	29%
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	0.003%
Multi-Racial	107	6.7%
White	959	61%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.0006%
Total K12 Enrollment	1,583	

The AIG program at the K-5 level is representative of 11 White students, 1 Black student, and 2 Multi-Race students. Furthermore, the middle school AIG population is representative of 33 White students, 4 Black students, 4 Multi-Race students, and 1 Hispanic. The high school AIG program represents 37 White, 8 Black, and 1 Hispanic (see Table 2).

In addition to reviewing AIG data, advanced level course data displays 30 White students enrolled in Chemistry Honors and 11 Black students, while 22 White students are enrolled in Pre-Cal and 11 Black students (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). The data displayed demonstrate disparities that have to be addressed in order to close academic gaps present and level the playing field for all students while creating equitable learning opportunities for all students. The analysis of the information above helps to demonstrate the problem as well as helps to formulate a plan for addressing the issue. It is important to have vital information in order to accurately assess the problem and implement strategies for improvement.

Problem Statement

"We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else" (Obama, 2013, p. 3). No matter what circumstances children are born into, they deserve an opportunity to be successful in life. As an educator, it is important to serve as advocates for students and show them support in their academic endeavor by being aware of curricula decisions that arise daily that affect them. Maintaining awareness will allow educators the opportunity to review the needs and challenges faced daily with providing equal educational opportunities for all students. Therefore, increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school is an area of concern that will be addressed in this study.

Table 2

AIG Students Pride County High School

Ethnicity	Enrollment	Percentage
AIG-White	37	7.6%
AIG-Black	8	1.6%
AIG-Hispanic	1	0.002%
Students Not Identified as AIG	439	90.5%
Total School Enrollment	485	

Table 3

Pride County High School Chemistry Honors

Ethnicity	Enrollment	Percentage
White	30	6.2%
Black	11	2.3%
Hispanic	1	0.002%
Multi-Racial	1	0.002%
Student Not Enrolled in Chemistry Honors	442	91.13%
Total School Enrollment	485	

Table 4

Pride County High School Pre-Calculus

Ethnicity	Enrollment	Percentage
White	23	4.74%
Black	11	2.26%
Hispanic	1	0.002%
Student Not Enrolled in Pre-Calculus	450	92.78%
Total School Enrollment	485	

This study will examine the lack of minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school. All students are entitled to a fair and equal education. "Access to high level curriculum needs to start long before high school; School districts need to make sure elementary and high schools provide curriculum to all students that places them on the track to graduate college and career ready" (CPE, 2016, p. 5). Early intervention is especially beneficial to children who come from low-income and non English speaking families because it helps to provide supports for them to start school on a level playing field as their peers who may come from more advantaged backgrounds (CPE, 2016). According to Asamoah (2017), "The main factor is that more White people take AP classes because they have more resources and are encouraged by their teachers and peers" (p. 1). This research will focus on increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes at Pride County High School. As educators, it is our job to provide equal opportunities to all students as well as help them to see the benefit of gaining a well-rounded education. Students need to work to their full potential but often, we have to help them to see their potential. While reviewing enrollment data for advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school, it does not appear that the playing field is level for all students because there seems to be a disproportionate number of minority students enrolled in advanced courses.

Educational equity provides all students with the education they need to achieve certain outcomes in life (Levitan, 2016). It is important to remember that students are different and deserve the opportunity to engage in an academic setting that caters to their individual needs. Furthermore, a just education offers all students the chance to understand their skills and abilities while making sure that historical injustices are addressed to give all students access to a quality education regardless of race or socio-economic status (Levitan, 2016). "As educators, we have a moral obligation to change the culture and improve systematic processes and procedures that are

currently in place. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 190). This quotation from James Baldwin reflects the duty and moral obligation of educators to attempt to eliminate any inequitable structures in place in today's classrooms that will hinder student achievement. As assistant superintendent, it is important to me that all students are provided educational opportunities to meet their academic needs.

Purpose of the Study

When parents send their children to school, as educators, we have to understand that they are entrusting their "babies" to us to provide them with a quality education and to treat them in a fair manner. As educators, we have a responsibility to work diligently to close the achievement gap by setting high expectations for all students and engaging them in academic learning opportunities of a rigorous nature that challenge and open new doors to learning for them (Quinton & National Journal, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to examine why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes and explore means by which to address this discrepancy. Action research will be used for the purpose of this study. The findings of the study will be used to implement a plan that will increase minority enrollment in advanced classes. The data collection process for the quantitative method will focus on surveys and the student information system data such as End of Course tests, End of grade test, classroom grades and CogAT (Cognitive Ability Test) testing. CogAT testing is used to identify children for the academically gifted program and to measure a student's cognitive abilities. The qualitative data will consist of interviews with stakeholders including parents, students, and teachers along with classroom observations. The combination of both methods will produce a mixed research study.

Study Questions (s)

Increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes in a rural North Carolina high school is a research topic that causes one to delve deep into previous and existing data, policies, procedures, and recruitment efforts that are currently in place in order to determine trends that will answer the question of why minority enrollment appears to be low in advanced level classes. This research will consist of three questions that will address the research and provide significant background information for an understanding of the existing problem. The data will support the need to make changes that will increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes.

The following study questions will be utilized to guide this study:

1. How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in gifted classes?

The variables examined are the policies and procedures currently in place for enrollment into advanced level classes. Understanding the current policies and procedures in place will assist with determining how to modify or change current policies and procedures in place as well as suggest new ones.

2. How does the school district address disproportionality in advanced level classes?

The variables analyzed will be Powerschool enrollment data for advanced level classes that contains race and ethnicity information for each student. Data will also be collected from interviews and observations.

3. How does professional development around equity affect the placement of students in advanced classes and advanced programs?

The variable will be enrollment data for advanced level courses that contain race and ethnicity information for each student. Data from enrollment, interviews, and surveys will be used to measure effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The way a school community deals with matters of race can potentially have a positive or negative effect on students who are participating in advanced level classes as well as those who are considering enrollment. The overall school culture plays an important role in the approach students use to dictate their own education. It is important that the role of race be examined as it relates to the education of minority students in schools across America. For the purpose of this research, Critical Race Theory will be reviewed in order to provide a platform of understanding of why minority students are often omitted from advanced level classes.

According to Rebecca Bodenheimer (2019), legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term Critical Race Theory in the late 1980s and it emerged as a challenge to the idea that the United States had become a color-blind society where one's racist identity no longer had an effect on one's economic status. There were many proponents of Critical Race Theory who alleged that racism and White supremacy were important factors in the American Legal System. One of those proponents is Derrick Bell who argued that Brown v. Board of Education was a result of the self-interest of elite Whites rather than a desire to desegregate schools and improve educational opportunities for Black children (Bodenheimer, 2019). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was a movement, which began with those who studied the relationship between race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) raised the issue of Critical Race Theory relative to education. These authors believed that Critical Race Theory could play a pivotal role in race and issues of racism in the educational system.

Definition of Key Terms

Advanced Placement – An educational program that allows high school students to take introductory college level courses and gain college credit if they meet the required score of three or higher on the required End of Course exam (Warne et al., 2015).

Honors Classes – Higher level classes that are more academically challenging and reserved for talented high school students who excel in certain classes and work at a high pace (Great Value Colleges, 2019).

College Readiness – The academic and practical knowledge needed to be successful in higher education (Falcon, 2015).

Achievement Gap – The differences in academic performance between groups of students with different ethnic, racial, gender, language, disability and/or income status (National Education Association [NEA], 2015).

Opportunity Gap – The Opportunity Gap can be defined as the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Inequitable Distribution – To deny the right for all students to receive adequate resources and opportunities based on race causing the promotion of educational disparities which limit minority student access to school programs that are essential to reaching students academic, intellectual, socio-cultural and fiscal inequities (Ford & King, 2014).

Tracking – Also known as "Ability Grouping", is the practice of grouping children together according to their talents in the classroom (NEA, 2015).

Disproportionality – The "overrepresentation" and "underrepresentation" of a particular population or demographic group in special or gifted education programs relative to the presence of this group in the overall student population (NEA, 2007).

Underrepresented Student – Someone whose ethnic or racial makeup if from one of the following:

1. African American/Black

2. Asian: Filipino, Hmong or Vietnamese only

3. Hispanic/Latino

4. Native American/Alaskan Native

5. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

6. Two or more races, when one or more are from the preceding racial and ethnic categories in this list (University of California, San Francisco, Office of Diversity and Outreach, 2019)

EOG test – North Carolina End of Grade Tests are used to measure student performance on the goals, objectives and grade level competencies as outlined in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCDPI, 2020).

EOC test – North Carolina End of Course Tests are used to gain a sample of student's knowledge of grade level competencies and objectives as outlined in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCDPI, 2020).

Powerschool – a web-based software system used to report student grades, demographics, parent contact information, discipline, attendance, class schedules and many other items of interest relative to student achievement (NCDPI, 2020).

EVAAS – examines the impact of teachers, school and district on the student learning in specific courses, grades and subjects (NCDPI, 2020). Users are able to access easy to understand charts and graphs that produce customized reports that predict student success (NCDPI, 2020).

CogAT – Measures cognitive development and problem solving skills in students. The test focuses on verbal battery, quantitative battery and nonverbal battery and is used to identify students who may be academically or intellectually gifted (Riverside Insights, 2020).

Implicit Bias – The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner (The Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following are assumptions of the scholarly practitioner:

1. All principals and teachers are aware of the disparity present between minority and non-minority enrollment in advanced classes.

2. All principals and teachers were provided the data to illustrate the Opportunity Gap present.

3. There is inherent bias present in the selection process that is hindering enrollment of minority students.

4. The current policies and procedures in place do not ensure that underrepresented populations of students are enrolled in advanced classes.

5. Some teachers do not understand culturally responsive pedagogy; therefore, lesson plans are not structured to meet the needs of all students.

Scope and Delimitations

This study will be conducted in a small rural school district in North Carolina located in the Pride County, North Carolina. Pride County is a small, rural county in North Carolina that borders the Virginia line.

According to the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau, the population was 11,573 and the current student body enrollment for the school system is 1,589. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that at the time of the study, the community was majority White, serving students from middle to low socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, 64.9% of the population was White, while 31.7% of the population was African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The median household income is approximately $52,481.00 and the percentage of poverty within the county is 15.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau also records that 86% of the residents of Gates County are high school graduates and 15.7% of the residents have a Bachelor's Degree or higher (see Table 5).

Permission for participation in this study was gained and supported by the Superintendent of schools, the assistant superintendent of schools, and Board of Education members. Parents, teachers, counselors and students were notified of the study. Safeguards were implemented to protect the identity of the students involved in this study. The results of this study are specific to this school and may or may not be replicable elsewhere.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. The study is limited to the students attending one particular rural high school in North Carolina. As such, this is a small sample and results may not be applicable elsewhere.

2. The individuals participating in a focus group and those being interviewed may not be completely honest in their answers. Since the scholarly practitioner is a graduate from the same high school she is conducting research within and is currently employed as the Assistant Superintendent for the school district in the same district she is

Table 5

Pride County Citizen Ethnicity Data

Ethnicity	Percentage of Citizens
White	64.90%
Black	31.70%
Other	3.40%

conducting research, participants may assume that inherent bias is present on the part of the scholarly practitioner.

Advancing Educational Equity

The study will make a difference by highlighting the existence of an issue that affects student equality in the educational opportunities offered within the high school setting. The study will establish the opportunity to implement innovative methods for identifying minority students who are academically ready to enroll in advanced classes. Creating an equitable academic environment that focuses on providing educational opportunities for all students will support the need to establish a culture of learning that identifies minority students for enrollment in advanced classes. Not only will minority students be identified for advanced classes but staff members will develop mentor relationships with all students and advocate to destroy negative barriers in place that hinder student growth.

Summary

Chapter 1 highlights an introduction into the study of "Increasing Minority Participation in advanced Programs and Classes in a Rural North Carolina School District" by providing the reader with the purpose of the study, research questions that focus the study, key terms that clarify misunderstandings and misconceptions relative to the study and the Conceptual Framework used to identify the significance of the study. Advancing educational equity in Chapter 1 demonstrates how a school system will change current enrollment practices to ensure that minority students are offered equal educational opportunities.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The aim of this chapter is to examine and synthesize research related to the lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes in high school. The intent of the research is to demonstrate the necessity to expand access to a rigorous curriculum to underrepresented student populations. It is important to note that the terms rigorous curriculum, equity and access and culturally responsive teaching and curriculum will be referred to often as they relate to advanced level coursework.

Public schools are tasked with making sure all students are provided a quality education that will prepare them for life beyond high school. In order for educators to prepare students for a quality education, they must access their ability levels and enroll them in the appropriate classes. Since schools offer a variety of classes to meet the needs of the entire student population, educators must maintain an active role in the enrollment process to ensure that all students are adequately placed in classes that will challenge their academic intellect. All students who are ready for the challenge and rigor of advanced level classes should be afforded the opportunity to enroll in those high level classes. This chapter will further examine research that focuses on some of the barriers and obstacles that hinder minority enrollment in advanced level classes as well as the role of building leaders in understanding those barriers while working toward creating equitable access for all students.

Enrollment data from the student information system at Pride County High School illustrates that minority students represent a small percentage of the overall enrollment in advanced classes. Therefore, it will be important to use the research to establish a plan of action that will level the playing field for all students and increase minority enrollment in advanced

classes. A review of the literature identified emerging themes that all centered around equity and access, supports, and the role of educational leaders in recognizing the gaps present.

Historical Perspective

The education of African Americans in the United States has been a long discussed topic that began with slavery over 400 years ago and still finds its way into the education conversation today. Equal educational opportunities should exist for all students no matter their skin color. The landmark court case Brown v. Board of Education sounded off the need for an education system that would allow all students equal access and opportunity to engage in challenging academic programs and experiences (Lawson-McKinnie, 2016). Regardless of what the beliefs are, most can agree that all children deserve equal access to educational opportunities that will help them to achieve their dreams and be successful in life. As educators sit daily at various tables of learning, they are faced with ensuring that all children are exposed to an academic culture that will meet their needs, yet, offering a rigorous curriculum to African American children seems to be absent from the conversation as well as the opportunities. Since this research focuses on increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes in a rural North Carolina high school, it is important to understand the educational history associated with African Americans in the United States.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, many people were kidnapped from the continent of Africa and forced into slavery in America, causing them to work as indentured servants in the production of crops such as tobacco and cotton (History.com, 2009). During this time, slavery became widespread and although the United States Congress outlawed the African slave trade in 1808, it still seemed to flourish and nearly tripled over the next 50 years (History.com, 2009). By 1860, the slave population in the South had grown to nearly 4 million in population. Slavery

became a thriving business that paid large dividends for slave owners. However, slaves were the ones who struggled during this time because they were not allowed to read and write and their freedom to move around were restricted. Additionally, a slave woman's body was not her own and many of them often found themselves being used for sexual satisfaction for the master (Thirteen Media, 2004). It was not until September 22, 1862 that Lincoln issued a preliminary emancipation proclamation, which became official on January 1, 1863 making slaves within any state or designated part of a state free (History.com, 2009). Finally, on December 18, 1865, slavery was officially abolished and slaves were granted their freedom following the ratification of the 13th Amendment. When slaves were freed, they had to learn how to live because they had always taken instruction from a master and they had no formal skills of survival. Since learning to read and write was usually prohibited by the master, some slaves had taken it upon themselves to learn from their parents, spouses, family members, and fellow slaves as well as received instruction from their masters or hired tutors (Intelexual Media, 2017). Slaves who learned to read and write had the foresight to prepare for a better day because they believed things would change for them one day. It was also during this time period that Jim Crow laws were enacted and used as a way to continue racial segregation. Under the Jim Crow System, Black Codes were put in place to seize Black children to work, decide when and how freed slaves could work, decide how much money they could make, take away voting rights, put Back citizens back into a system of indentured servitude, and control where Blacks lived and how they traveled (History.com, 2018). Blacks had very limited freedom under Jim Crow and experienced cruel and unfair treatment. It was no secret that slavery may have ended but racial discrimination was alive and thriving. Many Blacks were incarcerated at higher rates and given longer sentences than their White equals. Black schools were vandalized, violence escalated and gruesome acts

were committed against Black individuals and the Ku Klux Klan was born. The Ku Klux Klan was a secret society comprised of many members from the highest level of government who were responsible for terrorizing Black communities (History.com, 2018).

During the Antebellum Period there were anti-literacy laws in place to prohibit slaves from being educated during slavery. For example, an 1847 Missouri law stated that "No person shall keep any school for the instruction of negroes or mulattoes, reading or writing, in this state" (Legal Legacy, 2017). This law carried a consequence of a potential six-month jail term for violators. In addition to the law, if a slave was caught learning to read and write, the masters would often beat them severely, brand them, cut off their fingers or even kill them. Yet, many slaves were still willing to take the risk of being caught in order to learn how to read to write and write. The law today grants all children the opportunity to receive an equal education and as educators, we are responsible for making sure all children are provided an equal and equitable education. Frederick Douglass was once quoted as saying "Education means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free" (Frederick Douglass Heritage, 2020). It is hard to grasp the concept that someone would work tirelessly to ensure that individuals were denied the opportunity to engage in the process of reading and writing simply because their skin color was different than that of a White person. Education is valuable and it offers children an opportunity to be liberated. When children learn to read and write, it opens up a new world of opportunities for them that they may not have known existed. While there were many who made sure educating the Negro did not happen, there were others who had a completely different belief. "In 1817, a White missionary opened a Sunday school for the purpose of educating slaves in St. Louis, Missouri while another White minister also in Missouri devoted every Sabbath morning to

teaching slaves to read and write and expressed to others that slaves learned to read and write quicker than Whites (Legal Legacy, 2017).

Despite efforts to become educated, only 5% of slaves were literate in 1860 (Buck, 2010, p. 45). It was only after the Civil War that former slaves were able to pursue an education. Gaining an education would allow free slaves to help illiterate slaves learn to read the Bible, understand the legal rights, negotiate labor contracts and buy or lease land (Buck, 2010, p. 45). It was during this time that many individuals, mostly White from the North, journeyed to the South to become teachers in Black schools. This sounds like a noble gesture, but it was met with resistance from groups such as White racists and the Ku Klux Klan (Buck, 2010, p. 45). Teachers were subjected to hateful words, mean taunts, sneers, and violence such as floggings and being shot. Educating the "niggers" was not exactly an action that was highly esteemed during that time (Buck, 2010, p. 46). Some things are truly difficult to understand, especially when you have a belief system that all individuals should be treated equally.

As the 19th and 20th centuries unfolded, racial tensions remained high as many individuals continued the fight to maintain racist attitudes and actions and others began a crusade for equal treatment. In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, better known as the NAACP, was founded by a biracial group. The overall intent of the organization was to counteract White violence against Blacks that was taking place across the country (Tushnet, 1986). Furthermore, the NAACP was instrumental in litigating court cases of discrimination while working hard to obtain political and civil rights for Blacks. Since the NAACP was vested in helping to make sure the civil rights of Blacks was not violated, there was a need for additional funding to support the work being done. Therefore, the NAACP leaders sought out the opportunity to obtain a substantial grant from the American Fund for Public

Service, founded by Charles Garland (Tushnet, 1986). When Garland was a student at Harvard College, he inherited over one million dollars from his father. As a result, he used the money to establish the Garland Fund to support "new or experimental agencies" (Tushnet, 1986). Providing educational opportunities for Blacks was a topic of discussion for the NAACP was focused on ensuring the Black students were offered equal academic opportunities. In order to support education, the Garland Fund donated $5,000 towards the financing of Black schools in Georgia, Mississippi, North and South Carolina and Oklahoma (Tushnet, 1986). As the NAACP began to focus more on educating Blacks, they had to gather information that would help them to determine the needs. In 1927, the Crisis Journal, edited by W.E. B. Dubois, printed an article that included statistics representative of the disparities in per capita funding for Black and White students. For example, the report for Georgia showed an average per pupil expenditure of $36.29 for Whites and $4.59 for Blacks, and average teacher salaries of $97.88 per month for Whites and $49.41 for Blacks.

During the year of 1917 and 1932, Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald built schools across the South known as Rosenwald Schools (Roose, 2011). These two classroom schools were built for the purpose of educating Black children during the early 20th century. Rosenwald schools are especially important to the scholarly practitioner since it was the her family who sold the land for a Rosenwald School to be built in the scholarly practitioner's home town which is the focus point for this research.

During the early 1930s, there were Black and White schools being operated; however, Black children were still expected to work in the fields to help support the family, thus causing them to not be able to take full advantage of the academic courses being offered. According to one Jeanes supervisor, buses would pass filled with White children going to school while trucks

and wagons passed by with Negro children headed to the cotton fields for a days work (Thuessen, 2013). Although the law specified that Black children were entitled to an education, parents were faced with whether to send their children to school or send them to work to help provide for the family. By the 1940s, most school districts were operated equally; however, White privilege was still a part of curricula offerings (Thuessen, 2013). Noting the lack of supplemental readers in Black elementary schools, Black educator and State Board of Education member Harold Trigg lamented in 1956, "The Negro college student of today has had a one-reader education" (Thuessen, 2013).

"Education is a civil right through which each child can maximize his or her potential, thus representing the definition of equity (NSBA, 2019). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (History.com, 2019). The landmark decision declared that maintaining separate educational facilities for Black and White children was illegal and unequal. Furthermore, when equal educational opportunities are not provided to all students, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka continues to live and thrive. During the 1960s Civil Rights Era, individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall and the Little Rock Nine, which consisted of nine African American students who attempted to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, fought daily to integrate schools in order to provide African-American children with the opportunity to receive an education that would be equal to all students (Cook, 2015). Many individuals felt the need to partake in the movement because it was morally wrong to deny any race of individuals the opportunity to receive a quality education. The pioneers who fought for civil rights helped to advance the cause in many ways.

Being a child of the post 1960s, information was shared from family regarding the hardships experienced in the 1960s relative to segregation and Jim Crow. This was a topic that was difficult to discuss because it was a personal experience of what it was like to have to use a water fountain marked as "Blacks only", or have to go to the back of the restaurant to pick up a bag of food that was thrown at you or have to sit in the back of the theatre and have the White crowd throw popcorn at her and her friends while yelling various obscenities to Blacks. We can only hope that shedding light on the concerns and issues that plague America will bring a change and people will begin to accept each other for who they are and not for what they look like.

Diversity

The United States has often been referred to as a "Melting Pot" due to different races, languages and traditions blending together to create one unified society that is accepting of all cultures and ethnicities. The idea that different cultures and ethnicities getting along and working together can be a start to establishing an equitable learning environment if all individuals are willing to share that notion. However, instances still remain where individuals of different races are not accepted for who they are nor are they provided equal opportunities. Public schools are a prominent example of a setting that does not readily embrace the idea of diversity when it comes to advanced classes (Ford, 2015). As educators, we have to embrace the idea of diversity and equity in order to provide all students with a quality education. The Center for Public Education (CPE) quoted the National School Boards Association as saying "Public schools should have equitable access and ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to succeed as contributing members of a rapidly changing, global society, regardless of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, English proficiency, immigration status, socioeconomic status or disability" (CPE, 2016, p. 2).

Advanced classes can be described as those that are identified as being at the Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) level. Currently, our public school setting in the United States consists of a variety of races and ethnicities of people such as Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Mexican, Latino and others from different cultural backgrounds, yet, only a very small percentage of minority students are enrolled in advanced classes. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) found that, although the African American population was 13.6% of the total U.S. population, the College Board (2014) reported that Black students comprised only 9% of the total population of all students that took at least one AP exam. It is important to understand that our nation's demographics are constantly changing and our schools have become very different, therefore, the manner in which our educational system provides academic opportunities is essential to helping students become well-rounded individuals both academically and socially (Ford, 2013).

Since our schools have inherited an influx of different cultures, it is important that educators ensure that our classrooms represent a diverse group of students who are ready for the learning and challenges associated with the classroom. In order to understand how to provide adequate opportunities for all students, we must be aware of the diversity present in our classes. Educators should know who their students are, what their learning styles are, what kind of cultures they represent and what their interests are. The beliefs, interactions and attitudes of school leaders both in the classroom and out, can cause a positive or negative experience for Black students (Evans, 2007). Students want to share an academic environment with their peers conducive to their learning styles and one that offers them the opportunity to excel.

Excellence and equality should be a part of everyday vocabulary usage in education, since an educator's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation, while continually identifying and closing academic gaps. As part of the mantra of excellence and equality,

educators should also be concerned with providing access to gifted education for those students who are generally underrepresented (Ford & Harmon, 2001). Approximately 69% of all public schools offer Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs, yet the majority of the students who enroll in those classes are disproportionately affluent, White or Asian (Quinton & National Journal, 2014). In her speech at a National Journal event in Des Moines, Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Education Department, shared with the crowd that we are not sending a message to minority students that we have confidence in them and expect them to be successful nor do we make them believe that we, as educators, are ready to prepare them with a quality education that will shape their futures (Quinton & National Journal, 2014). Educators should focus on doing a better job of making sure students from underrepresented populations are not excluded from attaining an education that meets their needs. In seventh and eighth grade, Black students comprise 16% of students, yet only 10% of them enroll in Algebra I while only 9% passed the course. Additionally, statistics show that one in five White students took Algebra I while only one in 15 Black students did (Cook, 2015). These statistics are alarming and further support the notion that gifted classes lack the presence of minority students.

Being cognizant of the implicit biases we harbor internally as human beings is also an area of focus that will help to bring change to a culture of divide. Implicit biases refer to the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that harbor within individuals toward the race, ethnicity, age and appearance of others and affect an individual's actions, and decisions (The Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015). When trying to make sense of implicit bias, it is important to understand the traits associated with it which include the following:

- Implicit biases are pervasive in that everyone possesses them.

- Implicit biases do not necessarily align with an individual's beliefs or even reflect his/her stance on particular issues.

- People tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own in-groups (Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015).

Implicit biases can often predict behaviors in the real world that individuals may or may not be aware of. For example, "A 2012 case study used identical vignettes to examine how pediatrician's implicit racial attitudes affected treatment recommendations for common pediatric conditions. Results revealed that the pro-White implicit biases increased and White pediatricians were more likely to prescribe painkillers for vingrette patients who were White as opposed to those who were Black (Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015). Implicit biases can also cause barriers to opportunity such as housing, education, health and criminal justice (Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015). Since implicit bias is a characteristic that individuals are not always aware of, it is important to constantly evaluate our thoughts and actions to determine if there are areas in our lives that need adjustment. As educators, we should attempt to be mindful of our actions and speech directed toward others in an effort to practice equality for all.

Brown v. Topeka Board of Education was the cornerstone case in America that focused on diversity and equality for all students. This landmark case reminded America that separate was not equal and forced federal, state and local governments to open public schools to all children in the community (CPE, 2016). Although this case was pivotal in addressing the denial of equal rights for African Americans in 1954, this country is still faced with issues and concerns of equity in the 21st century. Issues of racism and equal rights continue to be at the forefront of

conversations in the workplace, community and even in the classroom. Instead of focusing on establishing classrooms that represent a diverse population of children, public schools have become complacent in the fact that 17% of our nation's public school students are Black, but only 10% of students enrolled in gifted and talented programs (Pirtle, 2019).

There are many gaps in achievement present among low income, minority and English Language Learners that became noticeable in the eyes of educators with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Legislation in 2001 (Bland & Neve, 2012). Educators began to take a second look at the disparity present among the diverse population of students within schools across the United States. It seemed that achievement for minority students was not a top priority and instead of someone accepting responsibility, many chose to place the blame on other factors such as lack of parental involvement, socio-economic status and single parent families. No Child Left Behind was designed with the following beliefs:

1. "All children can learn at a high level";

2. "The achievement gap between children of color and White children (rich and poor also) is not acceptable"; and

3. "The educational system must be held accountable for closing this gap and providing all children with the education they need to achieve at high levels" (Applied Research Center, Race and Public Policy Program, 2003, p. 21).

No Child Left Behind provided the nation with an inside glimpse of what the issues and concerns were within American schools. It also provided educators in all states with baseline information that they could use to strategically address the academic gaps present within children and devise a plan for how schools could improve student achievement for all students in all content areas.

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Social inequalities such as prejudice and discrimination permeate the thought that segregation is better for some students than integration. To deny all students equal access to gifted education and advanced classes is immoral and unethical (Ford & King, 2014). It is easy to remain complacent and reject change rather than create new opportunities and practice equality. Further, as noted by Ford and King (2014), "It is unprofessional and unethical to promote and permit the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities to students based on race, which frequently occurs with Black students" (p. 300). It has been said before that all students can learn. However, students should be afforded the opportunity to thrive in an educational environment that meets their academic needs. Society should not stereotype any race of people and assume the attitude that they are less capable of learning simply because of the color of their skin. Martin Luther King Jr., served as an example of someone who believed that all men were created equal and should be provided equal opportunities. His life's mission became one of ensuring that we establish a culture of diversity and equal treatment of all. When we fail to offer minority students entrance into advanced classes simply because we have less confidence in them, we are creating opportunity gaps and barriers for students, which are physical, financial and social-emotional inequalities that affect student learning (Havis, 2015).

If educators believe that all children deserve a quality education, they have to put aside any discriminatory practices, unfairness and prejudices that might hinder the opportunity to ensure that all students are offered the opportunity to engage in a rigorous and challenging curriculum that will meet their needs. High achievement is usually defined and measured by the "majority culture" (Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006), thus causing teacher's beliefs about giftedness to be overshadowed by their own cultural perceptions (Miller, 2009). Deficit theories cause us to believe that some children lack the ability and knowledge necessary for school

achievement due to cultural, social, or biological differences. A study by Wilson (2018) shows that Blacks and Latino students have a lower chance of being enrolled in advanced classes than their White peers. As racial diversity continues to increase in our nation and our schools, it is important that educators advocate for all students in order to create learning environments that are representative of our entire student population. Whiteness seems to dominate all aspects of the school building, from curriculum to teacher presence (Castagno, 2014). Additionally, Delpit (2006) referred to "a culture of power" when discussing school communities (p. 24). The power system in any school is one where the attitudes, behaviors, rules, curriculum and values all assimilate to a White culture (Carter et al., 2017; Castagno, 2014). To further illustrate Castagno's belief, a group of gifted students from the researcher's school district visited Christmas Town at Busch Gardens as an incentive for completing an assignment. There was a total of 25 students to attend and only 1 of the 25 was Black and one was Hispanic. We could ask if this practice is intentional or unintentional discrimination. The students questioned why there was only one Black student and as educators, we have to answer that question.

In White Plains, New York in 2011, the U.S. Department of Education cited certain groups of students as underrepresented in advanced classes and charged the school system with the task of remedying the problem (Wilson, 2018). In essence, the federal government indicated that minority students in grades 3-12 were underrepresented in advanced classes including Advanced Placement and honors classes and gifted and talented programs. Although the district was instructed to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes, there were no set guidelines to follow. Instead, the goal was to ensure that advanced classes consisted of a diverse population of students to represent the total student body. In the 2011-2012 school year, White Plains data revealed that Latino students made up 35% of the total student body, yet only 21% were enrolled

in advanced classes. Additionally, Black students made up 12% of the student body but only 9% were enrolled in advanced classes, while English Language Learners accounted for just under 8% of the student body and 0.6% were enrolled in advanced classes (Wilson, 2018). By 2016-17, the face of advanced classes in White Plains had changed and more and more Black, Hispanic and ELL students were beginning to enroll in advance classes. Programs such as AVID and My Brother's Keeper were instrumental in raising student awareness and helping to increase student academic ability level and confidence. Teachers were also involved in more training to handle larger classes and utilize differentiation. Minority enrollment numbers increased and educators were willing to have conversations centered around data, discipline, advanced classes, and giftedness in order to increase minority enrollment. Going to college and leveling the playing field became topics of concern for school staff as well as community members. White Plains took an approach to addressing the issue of minority enrollment in advanced classes and became a school who was set apart from others for offering equal opportunities to all students. Creating diverse learning environments tells students that we care about them and we want all of them to learn and be academically successful as well as learn how to get along with all races of people.

School Connectedness

In order to build relationships, it is important to make connections and understand the people whom we have been tasked with working or interacting with on a daily basis. We cannot form relationships with individuals if we never take the time to get up close and personal with them in order to learn about them. Relationships that are built on trust and concern develop over time and become the glue that holds a community of people together (The Austen Riggs Center, 2020). Regardless of whether we are in the workplace, in church or in school, we should be mindful that individuals possess various personality traits that are very prevalent in how they

interact with others. Once we recognize the differences in others, we have to be willing to form relationships with them in order to understand the cultural traits that have formed them into who they have become as a group of person. For sake of this research, school connectedness is a vital element to the overall academic success of students.

The lack of school connectedness seems to be a growing trend for millions of students across America and it seems that educators are not aware of this issue or have become complacent with it. Students who feel connected to school like going to school. They like their teachers and fellow students, and they are committed to learning, completing their assignments, and doing well" (Monahan et al., 2010, p. 3). With all the conversations occurring in the educational arena regarding equity, the lack of school connectedness should be at the forefront of those discussions, yet it is not. If we want to help students to become interested in school, we must first have an open and honest discussion about how to make schools more open, welcoming and nurturing in order to improve student, teacher and academic performance (Sulkowski et al., 2012).

Students want to feel emotionally engaged and connected to the school environment just as adults want to feel connected to their colleagues. If students feel a lack of engagement, they will separate themselves from the learning environment and withdraw themselves both academically and emotionally (Salman, 1988). A student's sense of belonging starts in elementary school and continues through high school. "By high school, a large proportion of youth are disconnected from school which can lead to a broad range of behavioral, emotional, and academic problems; improving school connectedness is, therefore, an important issue for schools and a target for preventive efforts" (Monahan et al., 2010, p. 3). As educators, we either support the problem or we reject it. If we support the problem, students feel a connection to the

school environment and have a desire to be academically successful. On the other hand, if we reject it, students become disconnected to the school environment and tend to withdraw and lack a motivation to learn and be academically successful. Teacher-student relationships that allow for caring connections between teachers and students promote school belongings (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014).

A lack of connectedness to the school environment can cause many barriers to education that hinder the overall productivity of students in the classroom in the following areas: lack of motivation, dropout likelihood, risky behavior, discipline and absenteeism. Youth who feel a sense of belonging to the school climate are less likely to engage in behaviors such as absenteeism, bullying and fighting and are more likely to display motivation, engagement and completion rates (Blum, 2005). When parents send their children to school, they are sending them in good conscience and trust that the school staff will nurture, protect and take care of them. When forming parent-teacher and student-teacher relationships, it is important to remember that the parent-teacher relationship appears to play a major role in fostering school connectedness and can also be quite helpful in facilitating meaningful conversations and encouraging parental involvement in schools (Serpell & Mashburn, 2011).

Advanced classes are instrumental in the lives of students who are identified as honors or AIG; however, there are many students who tend to get overlooked and never offered the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes if they are minority, perceived as being discipline problems, or if they are not connected to the school environment. There is a great divide between teacher and students at the school level and we, as educators, must begin to address this growing concern. Students want to feel accepted, valued and respected in the school environment and

when that aspect is lacking, students tend to withdraw and develop a negative attitude towards school (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

School connectedness and teacher perceptions are connected and have an effect on the academic opportunities and successes that students experience at school. Some teachers exhibit higher expectations for White and Asian American students versus Black and Latino students (Baron et al., 1985). Many minority students miss out on the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes because teachers perceive that they are not interested in school and not interested in being challenged. According to the results of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, teachers believe that Black students display less effort in school, get lower grades and are not driven to achieve as compared to the White counterparts who demonstrate a desire to learn. These internal attitudes are passed to students in an external manner and can have damaging effects.

Motivation plays a huge role in who enrolls in advanced classes, yet, if a student does not feel connected to the school environment, he or she will not display motivation. Since motivation influences learning and performance, when it is not present within students, it becomes a barrier and plays a crucial role in the academic and performance gaps that are present (Kusurkar et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the lack of motivation can cause teachers to develop stereotypical views of minority students thus causing them to not be considered for advanced classes.

Building relationships with students is necessary because it will provide teachers with the opportunity to understand different cultures as well as personalities of students, especially minority students. Once relationships are established with students and teachers have a better picture of who their students are, they will begin to offer more opportunities to them and advocate for them to be treated equally. Students should not have to experience discrimination in

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school by the very individuals who are responsible for ensuring the teaching and learning process in the lives of all students (Brittian & Gray, 2014).

It is important to provide positive and nurturing environments to all students in order to help students to develop academically and socially (Hemmeter et al., 2012). We must ensure that all students experience a school setting that is conducive to equal learning for all. Once students feel a sense of connectedness to the school environment and establish relationships with their peers and school staff, they seem to perform better academically.

Tracking

Another factor that seems to play a role in how students are placed in advanced classes is tracking. Tracking, better known as ability grouping, is the process of grouping students in different classes based on their ability level (Brunello & Checchi, 2007). This practice has been used in the American educational system since the late 1800s. "Tracking was a response to the arrival of large numbers of ethnically and culturally diverse immigrants" (Salman, 1988, p. 2). The assumption has been that if students are grouped according to their academic ability, they will receive an appropriate education that meets their academic needs. Having students grouped according to their ability levels will offer teachers the opportunity to access their ability levels, provide supplemental instruction and enriching strategies that will support the teacher in his or her quest to adequately address the academic gaps present within individual students. The issue of tracking in schools has often been a controversial topic that educators disagree on. Educational experts attack ability grouping as racist, elitist or simply a bad way to teach (Salman, 1988). When addressing the concern of equity in schools, the practice causes educator to reflect on the true meaning of equitable distribution in classes.

Students deserve the opportunity to come to school and function in an academic setting that is conducive to their learning. Since educators understand that there is no one size fits all formula used to teach students, it is important that learning styles are realized in order to ensure that all students are able to work to their full potential (Brookings Institute, 2020). Academic tracking is another common trait of school organization that hinders student achievement and produces inequalities (Giersch, 2018).

Equity is a buzzword in the field of education that is associated with education reform. However, in order to reform our educational system and change our practices that affect student academic success, there must be a willingness on the part of educators to identify all areas of concern that cause students to lack achievement. Historically, tracking has been among the dominant organizational practices in American public schools for nearly a century that was used to educate immigrant children who displayed limited capacity for learning (Futrell & Gomez, 2008). Nonetheless, tracking soon became viewed as a form of segregation (Kohli, 2014b).

As educators, it is important that all students receive a fair assessment of their potential based on their true abilities. Nonetheless, student ability should be based on a variety of criterion instead of using only high stakes testing or teacher recommendation (Giersch, 2018). It can be difficult to understand what students can do or what they are prepared for if they are never offered the opportunity to display their talents and learning capacities. Legette (2018) argues that in high track classes, teachers are more likely to engage the students in intellectual discussion that provokes critical thinking and analysis. On the other hand, teachers in low track classes tend to reduce the level of rigor present in academic materials as well as reduce opportunities for higher order thinking skills to be utilized (Giersch, 2018).

School tracking establishes a culture of differential learning and opportunities that may not be available to all students. Black students are disproportionately placed in non-honors tracks thus comprising their racial and academic identity (Legette, 2018). Students deserve to have self-confidence when it comes to education and should not feel as if they are being educated in a system that will stifle their self-confidence and academic ability.

Academic Advising

In the school system, all staff members have a vital role to play to ensure that all children are academically successful and working to their full potential. As we dissect the roles that all staff members play in the school, we tend to place more importance on the school principal and the teachers since the principal is responsible for managing the daily operations of the school while maintaining safety and establishing a school environment that is conducive to learning for all students and teachers. Although these individuals are essential to the school setting, the school counselor is another individual who has a great deal of responsibility for the success of students and for making sure all students are provided equal educational opportunities. Research shows that access to a school counselor can make a difference in student retention, grades and a student's likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2021). The school counselor is someone who parents entrust their student's future with and believe that all students will be afforded the same class offerings.

Approximately 92,000 students shared that their school counselors were most responsible for influencing them to consider gaining a postsecondary education (Jaschik, 2020). However, not all students are fortunate enough to have positive relationships with their school counselors. As a matter of fact, African American students are underrepresented in AP classes in high school and when they are enrolled in AP classes, they score significantly lower on the Advanced

Placement Examination than any other subgroup (Abama, 2018). "A U.S. Department of Education study concluded that African-American, Latino, and low income students are three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree if they even attempt an AP class in high school" (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). The school counselor plays an important role in advising students on what classes they should take to help them accomplish their goals and become college ready Furthermore, collaboration among the students, school counselor and administrators will create an academic culture for students that will help to close some of the academic and opportunity gaps that exist among minority students and ensure that equal access to a quality education is provided to all students. Additionally, according to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2020) national model, school counselors play a major role in identifying and developing a desire within students to attend college.

Unfortunately, school counselors are often overworked and lack the resources they need to adequately perform their job. The average student to counselor ratio is 482 to 1 which nearly doubles the 250 to 1 ratio that is recommended by the American Counselor (Fuschillo, 2018). Students in today's society seem to experience depression, anxiety and social pressures that require a great deal of personalized attention that school counselors are not always able to address. Nationwide, there are approximately 111,000 school counselors who serve 50.9 million students on a daily basis according to the American School Counselor Association (Tate, 2019). There are simply not enough school counselors in the United States. The Education Trust (2019) reported that only 1 in 5 high school students is enrolled in a school where there are a sufficient number of counselors working to meet the needs of the students which further means that there are 11 million students of color who do not have the benefit of working with a school counselor. Currently, the data indicate that 38 states are shortchanging students of color as well as low-

income students (The Education Trust, 2019). As part of supporting the work that school counselors do in schools daily and ensuring that schools are adequately staffed with school counselors, advocates for improving educational opportunities should begin to let their voices be heard within state, federal and local governments in an effort to provide additional resources for students and especially school counselors.

School counselors are often referred to as the gatekeepers to the classes that students enroll in and therefore, have an obligation to provide equity and access to all students. They are in a unique position to reverse institutional biases and barriers that challenge the civil rights and equal opportunities that should be afforded to all students by implementing strategies that will focus on offering an equitable education to all students. African American students makeup 14.7% of the national student population, yet they only comprise 9% of the AP enrollment (College Board, 2014). Similarly, Whites makeup 59.2% of the student population and 57.1% percent of the AP enrollment; Hispanic/Latinos make up 17.6% of the student population and 17% of the AP enrollment; American Indian/Alaska Natives makeup 1.1% of the student population and .6% of the AP enrollment; and Asian/Pacific Islander makeup 5.7% of the student population and 10.3% of the AP enrollment (College Board, 2014). The data reveal that an opportunity gap exist among minority students and they are not provided equal access to advanced classes.

Trust is a factor that must be earned and when school counselors take the time to build relationships with their students, help gain access for them, and understand student abilities, there is more exposure to academic opportunities (Holland, 2015). Nevertheless, the intimacy of the school counselor and student relationship role should establish a plethora of opportunities for all students. Since a huge part of the school counselor's job is to eliminate barriers and close

gaps that prevent students from flourishing in the classroom, he or she should make it a daily ritual to relinquish any biases or prejudices that prevents him/her from providing students equal access to advanced classes.

Many times, minority students, especially gifted Black males, experience lower teacher expectations, and teacher refusal to recommend them for advanced classes and unwelcoming gifted and advanced classes (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). In order to address issues of equity among minority students and their enrollment in advanced classes, the school counselor should work collaboratively with the administrator to identify the concerns and brainstorm ideas to eliminate barriers to student access and success. Not only must the culture of acceptance and equity be established but school counselors must understand that they have the authority to change the lives of students and set a level of expectation that all students can achieve and all students will be provided access and equity to advanced classes.

Parental Involvement

When children are born, they depend on their parents for the care and protection they need to develop into well-rounded children. As children continue to grow, their need for guidance, support and nurture remains in the hands of their parents. Upon reaching school age, parents begin to trust and depend on the school to protect, support, guide, care and educate their children. However, the effort to educate children must become a joint effort in order for children to be successful (Toldson, 2008). Although there are many factors that contribute to academic success for students, parental involvement is a primary contributor to a student's success.

For many years, parental involvement has been named as a contributing factor to the academic success of children. While it may seem that parental involvement is a non-negotiable

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and all parents should be engaged in the process, it is not the simple for some. Many parents cite the following factors as challenges to parental involvement:

- The do not have the luxury of time

- They are afraid

- The do not know how to be involved

- They do not understand why they need to be involved

- They do not understand the importance of being involved (Benner et al., 2016)

At times, parents are faced with attending a school event or working to make ends meet for their families. Low-income families who have limited benefits at work have no choice except to miss out on school events in order to work and provide for their family (Toldson, 2008). Perception is not always reality! For some parents, the perception is that they are not concerned about their child's education but in reality, they are concerned; yet they fail to see how they can be involved and provide for their family.

In 2016, research revealed that more than 87% of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to attend a school or class event (Child Trends, 2018). On the other hand, 54% of parents with a high school education or less were likely to attend a school or class event (Child Trends, 2018). Nonetheless, parental involvement is an area of concern that needs to be improved in order for student academic success to occur. When parental involvement is in place, students are more likely to gain higher grades in school, exhibit less discipline issues, display greater school engagement and score higher on achievement test (Benner et al., 2016).

Lack of parental involvement affects course schedule decisions for students and often time, minority and low-income students are not offered the opportunity to participate in advanced classes. Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are taken care of and

afforded a quality education; however, the home school connection has to be in place as a means of bridging the gaps present. The dilemma of parental involvement is one that remains a concern and educators must be creative in how they deal with the issue.

Socioeconomic Status

When children enter school, educators would like to believe that they all begin on a level playing field and all things are equal. However, to begin on a level playing field means that all children have access to equal opportunities and have equal ability levels which are untrue statements. School can be a place of opportunity for all students as long as educators realize that factors such as socioeconomic status and lack of parental involvement can be hindrances to student achievement.

Socioeconomic status is not only about income but also encompasses educational attainment, financial security and subjective perceptions of social status and social class (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). Regardless of the socioeconomic status of parents, all students are entitled to an education that is equal to that of their peers. For some students, their socioeconomic status may contribute to their overall quality of life. Research indicates that children from low socioeconomic families develop academic skills at a slower pace than students from higher socioeconomic families (APA, 2013).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was designed to provide additional monetary resources for schools that demonstrated high poverty levels. The overarching goal was to ensure that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, were provided a quality education as well as quality resources that cause them to be on a level playing field. However, some children are left behind at birth due to socioeconomic factors that are out of their control.

Furthermore, children from low socio-economic backgrounds display literacy skills that are five years behind those of high-income students (Reardon et al., 2013).

The American Psychological Association (2019) defined socioeconomic status as a combination of education, income and occupation that characterizes the social standing or class of an individual or group. Children are not responsible for the circumstances in which they are born. Nonetheless, educators have an obligation to provide a quality education to all children regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic background.

Research continues to link low socioeconomic status with academic achievement such as the following:

- The success rate of low-income students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines are much lower than that of students who do not come from underrepresented backgrounds (Doerschuk et al., 2016).
- In 2014, the dropout rate among students age 16-24 was higher in low- income families compared to those in higher income families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Low socioeconomic status causes the academic gaps in students to continually widen. Blustein (2013) also indicated that a lack of academic achievement can also cause career barriers to be significantly higher for minorities, women, those with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, and students from poor backgrounds.

In 2013, the federal government reported that one out of every five school-age child was living below the poverty line in the United States (Layton, 2015). It is important for educators and all those who are considered stakeholders in the education arena to understand that if the achievement gap is going to be closed, the issues that adversely affect students must be dealt

with first. Understanding socioeconomic status is vital to providing a quality education to students that meets their needs. Furthermore, if students are going to live a quality life upon graduation from high school and function in society as productive citizens, the stigmas associated with poverty such as poor health, drug use, incarceration and unemployment must be addressed (Benner et al., 2016).

Socioeconomic status determines whether students are classified as those who have or those who have not. In North Carolina, there are more than 1,500 schools identified as low performing with a School Performance grade of D or F. When a school is identified as low performing, the state provides assistance for that school by way of sending in a team of professionals to address the academic gaps present and offer suggestions on how to improve. Nonetheless, the one factor that state and federal government fail to consider is the socioeconomic status of the students attending each school. Some of those same schools have a majority of students living in poverty, and receiving free or reduced lunch, and come to school daily with survival being a priority more so than learning.

The number of school dropouts is higher among ethnic minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2009, students living in poverty were five times more likely to drop out of school, and poverty rates for African-American and Hispanic families were three times higher than those of Caucasian families (Chapman et al., 2011). In order to plan, provide and implement effective learning for all students, educators must be mindful of student ability levels and establish realistic goals for learning. Nevertheless, educators must be willing to remove all biases present in order to create a learning environment that is conducive for learning for all students.

When consideration is given to closing the achievement gap, all the factors that contribute to widening the gap must be analyzed. Socioeconomic status is a predictor of academic success for students. Nonetheless, the reality of a student living in poverty does not mean that a student cannot achieve in advanced classes in school, it means that students who live in impoverished conditions should not be denied academic opportunities because of their socioeconomic status. Therefore, they should be provided the opportunity to excel in advanced classes because they have the talent and ability to succeed.

Education reform begins when educators realize that the future of all children is important and that all students are entitled to equal educational opportunities regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status. In our pursuit of educational reform, something essential has been missing: the psychology of the student. Psychological factors, often called motivational or non-cognitive factors, can matter even more than cognitive factors for students' academic performance. These may include students' beliefs about themselves, their feelings about school, or their habits of self-control. These factors also offer promising levers for raising the achievement of underprivileged children and, ultimately, closing the achievement gaps based on race and income (Blackwell et al., 2007).

Conceptual Framework

The way a school community deals with matters of race can potentially have a positive or negative effect on students who are participating in advanced level classes as well as those who are considering enrollment. For example, if students meet the criteria to enroll in minority classes but are denied enrollment, they may think race is a factor. The overall school culture plays an important role in the approach students use to dictate their own education. It is important that the role of race be examined as it relates to the education of minority students in schools across

America. For the purpose of this research, Critical Race Theory will be reviewed in order to provide a platform of understanding why minority students are often omitted from advanced level classes.

According to Rebecca Bodenheimer (2019), legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term Critical Race Theory in the late 1980s and it emerged as a challenge to the idea that the United States had become a color-blind society where one's racist identity no longer had an effect on one's economic status. There were many proponents of Critical Race Theory who alleged that racism and White supremacy were important factors in the American Legal System. One of those proponents is Derrick Bell who argued that Brown v. Board of Education was a result of the self-interest of elite Whites rather than a desire to desegregate schools and improve educational opportunities for Black children (Bodenheimer, 2019). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was a movement, which began with those who studied the relationship between race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) raised the issue of Critical Race Theory in 1995 relative to education. These authors believed that Critical Race Theory could play a pivotal role in race and issues of racism in the educational system.

Race is considered a social construct, which means that race has no scientific basis or biological reality (Bodenheimer, 2019). While some believe that a persons' race determines his or her intelligence, Critical Race Theory does not support that belief. For the purpose of this research, the researcher examined race, colorblindness and storytelling as a few of the principals related to Critical Race Theory.

Racism is defined by Merriam Webster (2021a) as, "a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race". Most people of color experience some form of racism on a

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daily basis and consider it to be a normal part of society (Delgado & Stefancci, 2001). In today's society, race relations seem to be dwindling on the negative side rather than improving. Police are often accused of racial profiling; Immigrants are made to feel as if they are not wanted in this country; hate groups hold rallies that end in violence; schools in more prominent neighborhoods seem to be given more funding; and minority students are not showing up in advanced level classes. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, IV (1995) believed that aspects of the educational system characterize people of color as inferior. According to the Collins Dictionary (2020), "If one person is regarded as inferior to another, they are regarded as less important because they have less status or ability. All human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and without having to endure stigmas and stereotypes placed on them by others. The educators in the academic setting are responsible for preparing students to grow and develop both socially and educationally as well as offering them as equitable education that will meet their academic needs. Therefore, minority students should not have to accept the status quo that racism is a permanent fixture and a "normal" experience for Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2010). To accept the thought that racism is acceptable and should be tolerated only keeps a social structure in place that stops the equal rights movement for everyone.

Additionally, colorblind thinking assumes that equity can be achieved by applying the same rules to everyone across the board (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In the school environment, staff practice colorblind thinking on a regular basis because they believe all students are treated the same regardless of the color of their skin. School staff fail to understand the meaning of equality and equity when ensuring that all students are provided equitable learning opportunities that meet their individual needs. "Things that are the same size or have the same traits are said to be equal. When it comes to people, being equal means everyone has the same rights and

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opportunities — and responsibilities" (Merriam Webster, 2021b). Yet, research has shown that everyone does not have the same rights and opportunities. Racism creeps into society and denies equal rights to others. On the other hand, equity is the quality of being fair, impartial, or just (Freedictionary.com, 2021). If school staff were mindful of creating a fair educational setting that catered to the needs of all students, no matter their race, they would not continually neglect the diversity of academic and instructional needs (OECD, 2012). An equitable academic setting is one that demonstrates a sense of fairness and justice with making sure all students are enrolled in classes that meet their needs.

Storytelling is a method in which minority students are able to tell their stories about their experiences with racial subjection and how they must contend with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The process of storytelling allows minorities to share their stories with others as a form of healing. It can be seen as an outlet to dealing with the hurt and the pain that arises from shameful occurrences of racism. It is important for school staff to understand that storytelling is a part of Black culture and has been practiced over the years. Richard Wright once stated "I'm saying that the situation of their lived evokes in them an almost unconscious tendency to hide their deepest reactions from those who they fear would penalize them if they suspected what they really felt" (Knaus, 2009). Students should have the freedom in their classes to express themselves and not feel that they will be retaliated against for doing so. Storytelling also opens the door to building relationships between school staff and minority students. Whether a student is telling his or her story or a staff member is telling his or her story, it provides an understanding of different cultures, thus opening the door to a better understanding of students of color while denouncing racism.

This research uses Critical Race Theory as the conceptual framework because it provides the assumption that race and racism are major factors in education. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) stated that racism was viewed as a normal part of society and was something experienced daily by people of color. Racism is not something individuals should be complacent with; instead, individuals should work diligently to establish a system of fairness for all. A student's race should not play a role in whether or not a minority student is enrolled in advanced classes; yet, the research indicates that minority student enrollment is absent in advanced classes. Being treated equal is one thing but practicing equity is another. In the school setting, it is important to establish a culture of learning that includes all students. It is also important that we, as educators, take the time to understand the needs of minority students in order to support them in their quest to enroll in advanced classes. Educators cannot allow race to hinder the progress of minority students. Ladson-Billings (2010) believed that Black students endure daily indignities that take its toll on them. As a result of those indignities, minority students become disengaged and disconnected from the school setting, which leads to increased dropout rates (Knaus, 2009). The school environment should be one that is conducive to learning for all students in order to prepare them for a future that embraces their talents and potential. "Students should be learning exactly the skills necessary for them to navigate the world we live in, yet in my experience, schools often deny the conditions that lead students to develop life-saving skills (Knaus, 2009).

Critical Race Theory is vital to this research because it challenges the view that somehow racism is a normalcy that should be accepted and not changed (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). In order to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes, we must first accept that systems of oppression are still in place that have to change in order to support equality for all students. According to Knaus (2009), "Critical Race Theory exposes how mainstream schools promote

racism through White supremacist teaching practices, White based curriculum, and school designs that privilege White culture by ignoring and/or denying how racism shapes the lives of students of color." As educators, our focus should be centered on changing the antiquated structures of racism that have been in place for years that center on White culture rather than all cultures. Applying critical race theory to schools will ensure that minority students are served and offered the same opportunities as White students without re-centering the district, the county offices, state standards and funding that enhances the economically privileged (Knaus, 2009). Critical Race Theory allows for honesty to be expressed thus creating an environment for change to occur. Critical race theory defies the continued systems of racism and opens the door to new opportunities for all students no matter their skin color. Furthermore, critical race theory also serves as a gateway into transforming the current educational system into one that will be equitable for all students.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review has provided context for the research to be conducted based upon increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes. While reviewing demographic data in the literature disparities between White students and minority students were revealed within minority enrollment numbers in advanced classes. You often hear platform speakers make the statement that "Teaching is a matter of the heart" and if your heart is not in it, you're just going through the motions. That may be true in one sense or another; however, we have to look at all the variables involved in education. The information shared in the literature review demonstrates that there are many variables associated with why there may be a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes. As educators, it is critical that we use all the information provided to ensure that our students are prepared to meet the challenges they may face in the post-

secondary setting. It is true that factors such as parental involvement, school connectedness, diversity, socioeconomic status and academic advising all play their role in the academic success or lack of academic success experienced by students. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge the role that history and race have played in the education of minority students in order to understand the need for change. Change does not always come immediately but we have to begin to work toward implementing change that will focus on providing educational opportunities for all students that cater to their academic needs. By understanding the research associated with the problem of practice, we can begin to work towards achieving racial harmony in our schools by stepping outside the box of tradition and engaging in practices that will support student progress. Creating a system of enrollment that provides all students equal access is a first step to establishing equity within our school.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine how to increase minority student enrollment in advanced level classes. The following study questions will be examined by the scholarly practitioner in an effort to explore the reasons associated with why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school.

1. How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in advanced classes?

2. How does the school address disproportionality in advanced level classes?

3. How does professional development around culturally responsive pedagogy affect the placement of students in advanced level classes?

Research Design and Rationale

The scholarly practitioner will conduct action research to examine how to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) refers to action research as a wide variety of investigative, analytical and evaluative research methods used to diagnose problems and support educators in their quest to establish practice solutions to address the problem with the overall goal being to design a simple and practical process that will lead to improvement that will produce better results for schools, teachers and programs. Action research will work best for this research because it will allow the scholarly practitioner to be actively engaged in researching a problem of practice in a local school district that she is passionate about and desires to see positive change occur. In utilizing action research, the scholarly practitioner will engage in the following predefined process:

- Identify a problem to be studied

- Collect data on the problem

- Organize, analyze, and interpret the data

- Develop a plan to address the problem

- Implement the plan

- Evaluate the results of the action taken

- Identify a new problem

- Repeat the process (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015)

The scholarly practitioner will use a mixed methods approach to address the problem of increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school. According to the Center of Research Innovation in Teaching (Creswell & Clark, 2007), "A mixed research design involves having both a qualitative and quantitative design. Mixed designs are the best approach if the study requires both qualitative and quantitative designs to address the problem statement" (Creswell & Clark, 2007). One of the goals for the research is to determine why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. The outcomes of this research will begin the conversation on how the district can provide equitable academic practices for all students.

When conducting research, Mertler (2019) suggests that the scholarly practitioner consider the following core characteristics as a guide:

1. Persuasively and rigorously collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data based on research questions.

2. Mixing or integrating/linking the two forms of data either concurrently by combining or merging them, sequentially by having one build on the other or embedding one within the other.

3. Giving priority to one or to both forms of data, again based on research questions and the emphasis of the research.

4. Using these procedures in a single research study or in multiple phases of a program of research.

5. Framing these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses.

6. Combining the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study.

These core characteristics will provide the scholarly practitioner with an understanding as well as a guide to follow when engaging in research.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used within this research. When conducting quantitative research, the scholarly practitioner seeks to describe current situations, establish relationships between variables, and sometimes attempt to explain causal relationships between variables (Mertler, 2019, p. 93). For the purpose of this research, the scholarly practitioner is familiar with the current situation and will serve as an instrumental agent in making connections with participants. The quantitative data technique used for this research will be surveys completed by students and teachers.

In addition, qualitative research will be used for this research. Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; the focus of qualitative research tends to be on the quality of a particular activity rather than on how often it occurs or how it might be evaluated (Mertler, 2019, p. 77). This style of research will allow the researcher to gain

a better understanding of the problem of practice. The scholarly researcher will also be able to immerse herself into the setting of the research as well as work closely with the participants. The qualitative research methods used will include interviews and focus groups. Interviews with students and parents will be included in this study as well as focus groups with teachers and students.

The data from interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed. Afterwards, the data will be coded to reveal major themes and concepts present within the data, and the results will be used to improve the current practices in place. In order to address the above research questions, the scholarly practitioner will use surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc., to gain data. Afterwards, the data will be analyzed and the results will be used to improve the current practices in place. Since the scholarly practitioner will engage in action research, she will have the opportunity will be provided to focus on a topic of interest. The scholarly practitioner will also collaborate with others who have the same passion research and interest along with the desire to bring about a change.

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Population

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A population of people can be comprised of many different individuals; however, for the purpose of this study, the target population to be addressed consists of minority students enrolled in honor classes in a rural North Carolina high school. A minority can be defined as any group of people who are singled out and shown different and unequal treatment by others in society (Lumen Learning, 2021). The minorities focused on in this study are African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian, and multi-racial. The local school district studied is comprised of 1,660 students in total. There are 497 African American, 45 Hispanic, 97 represent

two or more races, seven American Indian, one Asian, one Native Hawaiian and one Native American students. There are 1,012 Caucasian students in the district.

The population of students focused on for this study include high school minority students who demonstrate the academic ability to achieve in honors classes, yet, they have never enrolled in one. More specifically, minority students in grades 10, 11 and 12 serve as the main focus for this study. Additionally, parents of these minority students who qualify to enroll in honor classes play a role in this research.

The only Advanced Placement courses taught at this North Carolina Rural high school are AP English and AP Chemistry; however, the honor classes consist of English, math, science, and history. The student information system data indicates there is less than 10% minority students enrolled in advanced classes in grades 9 through 12. Analyzing the data for current minority students enrolled in honor classes as well as minority students who qualify but are not enrolled is a focus for this research and will yield trends present that will help educators to change attitudes and cultural state of mind present that prevents all students from being offered equitable academic opportunities.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The scholarly practitioner will use purposeful sampling in this study due to a level of familiarity with the student body, teachers, school administrators, school counselors and parents. Participants will be selected based on enrollment data for minority students who are currently enrolled in honors classes and those who qualify for honors classes, but have not enrolled in one. The scholarly practitioner will examine minority student enrollment over the span of three years to identify any recurrent trends present that will shed light into answers to the selected research questions.

Since the scholarly practitioner was previously a principal in the district, which the research is being conducted, there is some familiarity with the students. An interest meeting will be conducted for prospective participants and parents to attend. At the meeting, the scholarly practitioner will discuss the goal of the study, the purpose of the study and what will be achieved from the study. Afterwards, the scholarly practitioner will solicit support from the group and document names of all students who agree to serve as research participants. The scholarly practitioner will utilize Powerschool enrollment data, a web-based software system used to report student grades, demographics, parent contact information, discipline, attendance, class schedules and many other items of interest relative to student achievement. The scholarly practitioner will also use EVAAS data to identify students who may not have attended the interest meeting but were predicted to score a level 4 or 5 on the End of Course test, yet, they were never offered the opportunity to enroll in an advanced level class. EVAAS is a customized software system available to North Carolina school districts and used to improve students learning and help teachers to reflect on their classroom effectiveness. EVAAS examines the impact of the teachers, school and district on the student learning in specific courses, grades and subjects (NCDPI, 2020). Users are able to access easy to understand charts and graphs that produce customized reports that predict student success (NCDPI, 2020). Participants will consists of 4 tenth grade students, 5 eleventh grade students and 3 twelfth grade students.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

According to the American Educational Research Association (2011), "Education researchers rely on scientifically, scholarly and professionally derived knowledge and act with honesty and integrity in their practices." The scholarly practitioner will conduct research within a

local school district with participants from the high school setting being used to engage the research.

The scholarly practitioner will use codes to replace participant names and policies and procedures will be used in accordance with those established by the Institutional Review Board at East Carolina University. No participant names will be shared nor will the school district be identified. Prior to conducting research, all participants will be provided the elements that would be included in the Informed Consent process, which includes the following:

- Purpose of Research

- Procedures used for Research

- Alternatives to Participation

- Foreseeable Risks and Discomforts

- Benefits of Research

- Length of Time for Subject Participation

- Researcher Contact Information

- Voluntary Participation Statement

- Statement Regarding Subjects Rights to Confidentiality and Right to Withdraw (Susan Rose, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects [OPRS]).

The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certification was completed, which consisted of 13 modules to be completed and submitted. Afterwards, the scholarly practitioner gained approval from East Carolina University (ECU) through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). Once IRB approval was acquired, the scholarly practitioner received district approval from the superintendent of Schools.

All participants will complete and submit an application for participation in the research. Additionally, the scholarly practitioner will host a parent meeting and provide information relative to the research and meet with all Board of Education members to ensure they are aware of the research being conducted. The meeting with Board of Education members will provide them with the opportunity to ask any questions they have to gain clarity of the research.

Instrumentation

The mixed methods action research study will examine the factors associated with the lack of minority students being enrolled in advanced classes. An important step in this process will be to find people or places to study and establish relationships with participants so they will provide good data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research methods will be utilized by developing semi-structured interview questions that were intentionally geared towards specific individuals and school sites. Semi-structured questions will be used for focus groups. Both sets of questions for interviews and focus groups will be accessible in the Appendices section of the study. Questions will be asked in a face-to-face setting. One of the most important factors to keep in mind about qualitative research is that the goal is not to generalize a large population, but rather to develop a thorough description of a specific phenomenon that is occurring in a particular setting (Mertler, 2019).

Quantitative methods will consist of survey questions that address the matter of how to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes. The survey questions asked will be direct and specific and will allow for measurable data to be collected. A method called random sampling will be used in order to select a group of individuals who are representative of a larger population in order to explore the problem (Mertler, 2019).

Students who have never been enrolled in an advanced level class, yet their grades indicate that they should have been enrolled will be interviewed. In addition, students who have been enrolled in at least one advanced level class will also be interviewed in order to gain student perspective about why minority students are not enrolled in advanced level classes. Additionally, the scholarly practitioner will participate in focus groups with teachers by using a set of predetermined specific questions to guide the conversation and gain student and teacher views on the lack of minority enrollment in advanced classes. The use of focus groups is especially helpful when time is limited and allows participants to openly express their thoughts, opinions, perspectives and idea on the topic (Mertler, 2019). All participants will be informed of their rights and will be made aware of the coding system that will be used to protect their names. All information gathered will be stored in a confidential location and kept in a locked file cabinet. The Interview Protocol containing all questions that will be used for interviews and focus groups will be identified as Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F and G of this study.

Procedures

Action Research Cycle 1

The scholarly practitioner will gain permission from the Institutional Review Board of East Carolina University and the Superintendent of the local school system. Staff members will provide consent for their participation in surveys, interviews and focus groups. Staff members will be informed that surveys will not take more than 10 minutes and interviews will not take more than 20 minutes. Students will be randomly selected based on their enrollment in advanced classes and their lack of enrollment in advanced classes. All participants will be informed that their names will be kept confidential.

A mixed methods research approach will be conducted. The scholarly practitioner will create an equity committee who will be responsible for reviewing current practices, policies and procedures in place as well as discuss concerns with equity. This committee will explore how other comparable school districts in rural North Carolina are handling matters of equity. The scholarly practitioner and the equity committee will travel to a neighboring school district to discuss how equity is addressed as well as observe advanced classes and inquire as to how they were able to increase their minority enrollment numbers. The scholarly practitioner will gather and review student data and class schedules from the student information system that will indicate the number of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. Additionally, EOC data in both reading and math will be reviewed to determine students who display the academic potential to enroll in advanced classes. EVAAS data will be used to provide a picture of student predictability regarding which students will be expected to score a level 4 or 5 on the EOC. Quantitative data will be compiled by administering surveys to students. Individual interviews will be conducted with high school administrators, teachers of advanced level classes, high school counselors, the AIG Coordinator and students who have taken advanced level classes as well as those who qualify for advanced classes but have never been recommended to take one. Qualitative data will be retrieved from the use of focus groups. The scholarly practitioner will conduct one focus group that will consists of two teachers of advanced level classes, one high school counselor, Academically, Intellectually and Gifted Coordinator (AIG) and the Career and Technical Coordinator (CTE) who is responsible for helping students explore their career options and providing real world exposure to careers while still in high school. The CTE Coordinator is also responsible for enrolling students in dual enrollment classes through the community college system. A second focus group will be conducted that will consists of five high school students

who have taken advanced level classes and 5 students who qualify for advanced level classes yet they have not be recommended to take an advanced level class. The focus group will be conducted after school at the local county library. A review of all policies and procedures that are applicable to student enrollment will occur. Focus groups and interviews will be conducted after school at the local county library. Surveys will take place during baron intervention time at the high school. Pride High School breakout time is an intervention/cultural enrichment time set aside daily that allows students to receive enrichment in classes they may be struggling in or participate in fun activity that is of interest the them.

Action Research Cycle 2

The scholarly practitioner will gather and examine all data from surveys, interviews and focus groups. Afterwards, the Equity Committee and the scholarly practitioner will meet to discuss the data gathered and discuss the outcome of the school visit. Based on the results of the data, the scholarly practitioner will meet with the high school principal, board members and the superintendent and make suggested changes to district and school policies and procedures that will be used to address disproportionality in advanced level classes. In addition, a set of new AIG Pathways may be implemented that could provide the opportunity for the underrepresented population of students to meet the criteria for AIG placement. AIG Pathways broaden the horizon and allow students to benefit from the possibility of being identified as AIG by demonstrating a lower GPA, yet, excelling on a performance based task. Students will be able to deviate from the traditional method of identification, which includes scoring at least 95% on the Cogat (Cognitive Ability Test), scoring a five on the traditional end of course test, and meeting teacher recommendation. Furthermore, the scholarly practitioner will create a professional development calendar that will implement professional development centered on equity and

culturally responsive pedagogy. A classroom observation tool will be created and used to determine whether or not culturally responsive pedagogy is present in classroom lessons. Post surveys and interviews will also be conducted with students and staff members to monitor changes that will occur.

Action Research Cycle 3

Within Cycle 3, changes implemented in Cycle 2 will be monitored and analyzed for effectiveness. When the changes in Cycle 2 are implemented, minority student enrollment in advanced classes is expected to increase. The outcome of the research will support the following goals for staff and students:

- Staff members will begin to understand what culture means in the school setting and how we all have to work together to form it.

- Staff members will begin to understand how culture plays a role in the academic setting.

- The district instructional leaders will begin to offer professional development sessions centered upon culturally responsive pedagogy for all who would like to participate.

- The district Equity Committee will remain in place to continually access, collaborate and suggest changes that will support learning for all students.

- Staff will be able to share their struggles as well as their successes.

- Surveys will be conducted twice a year with students and staff to gain feedback on the new changes.

- A monitoring tool will be created and used by the district curriculum director to ensure that the new changes will serve as a factor to address equity for all students.

Data Processing and Analysis

Once data is collected, it must be adequately prepared for analysis using statistical procedures (Mertler, 2019). The scholarly practitioner will collect data from interviews, focus groups and surveys that will yield specific information. Furthermore, the statistical procedures used to collect data will reveal what is typical and atypical within a group, to show similarities within a group, to make inferences about the population and to show relationships among variables (Mertler, 2019). The data collection process will allow the scholarly practitioner to adjust procedures used in gathering data, if necessary. Quantitative data analysis techniques will be used to show relative standing of individuals in a group, to show similarities and differences among the group, to identify errors, to seek significant findings and to make inferences about a specific population (Mertler, 2019).

Once focus groups and interviews have been conducted, the data will be transcribed by the scholarly practitioner to gain an understanding of the information shared within each group. This process will allow the establishment of recurring themes that will be relevant to the research. Furthermore, the scholarly practitioner will facilitate the coding of responses recorded from surveys by placing numerical values directly on the survey instrument (Mertler, 2019). Afterwards, the information will be uploaded into a software system called NVivo, which will help to securely store and code various themes present in each group.

Each research question will be used as a framework to identify patterns and themes in the data that will be examined to make changes to existing procedures and practices at the school level for identifying minority students to enroll in advance classes. Additionally, the data used will identify consistent and inconsistent information that will cause the researcher to restructure future questions for additional participants. NVivo will be used for data management and

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organization. The software is not used for in-depth data analysis, although it can be used to conduct preliminary coding.

Methodological Assumptions

The assumptions for the study were as follows:

1. All principals and teachers were aware of the disparity present between minority and non-minority enrollment in advanced classes.

2. All principals and teachers were provided the data to illustrate the opportunity gap present.

3. All students, who were eligible, were offered enrollment in advanced classes.

4. All parents were aware of the opportunities for enrollment in advanced classes present for minority students.

The above assumptions were necessary in the study to determine that the problem exists due to a lack of awareness.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the lack of minority enrollment in advanced classes in a rural North Carolina high school as well as examine how student achievement and minority enrollment in Advanced Classes correlate with each other. Increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes will help to close academic gaps and offer equitable learning opportunities. This study will be conducted in a small rural high school in North Carolina located in Pride, North Carolina. At the time of the study, the community was majority White, serving students from middle to low socio-economic backgrounds.

Permission for participation in this study was gained and supported by the superintendent of schools, the assistant superintendent of Schools, and the Board of Education members.

Parents, teachers, counselors and students were notified of the study. Safeguards were implemented to protect the identity of the students involved in this study.

Limitations

This action research study was used to explore why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. Limitations are those factors in research that cannot be controlled or influenced. The limitations involved in this study include:

1. The study is limited to the students attending a rural high school in North Carolina without any information regarding the existence of the same problem in urban and suburban high schools.

2. The second limitation is that the individuals participating in a focus group and those being interviewed may not be completely honest in their answers due to the position of power of the scholarly practitioner in the district.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

The scholarly practitioner in this study is the current assistant superintendent of Pride County Schools. The scholarly practitioner has direct knowledge of each of the participants in this study as students of Pride County Schools. Since the scholarly practitioner works extensively with Curriculum and Instruction, she has direct knowledge of student enrollment data, which includes race, for each advanced level class. The direct knowledge allows the scholarly practitioner to understand the problem present with the lack of minority enrollment in advanced level classes.

Prior to being named as assistant superintendent, the scholarly practitioner served as a middle school principal, which provided knowledge of the procedures and policies used for constructing student class schedules. Additionally, the scholarly practitioner also served as a high

school teacher in the district, which provided insight into the lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. The scholarly practitioner is a native and graduate of the school district and has witnessed the lack of minorities enrolled in advanced level classes.

Although there is knowledge of each participant, the scholarly practitioner will use the information learned during the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program to make sure best practices for conducting research are present. The scholarly practitioner has obtained approval from East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). After permission was granted by East Carolina University, the scholarly practitioner proceeded with gaining permission from students, teachers, parents, school administrators and school counselors who will be participating in the study. The scholarly practitioner will adhere to all precautions involving risk for the participants. All participants will be informed by the scholarly practitioner that their participation is voluntary. Participants will have the option to discontinue their participation at any time without penalty.

The scholarly practitioner's unwavering determination to provide equitable academic opportunities to all students is a priority of this study. The goal of the scholarly practitioner is to use the data from this study to make changes to the current policies and procedures in place that will be used to determine student enrollment in advanced level classes while increasing minority enrollment. The scholarly practitioner will also use the data gained to establish an academic culture that provides equitable academic opportunities for all students in Pride County.

Summary

Through the use of surveys, interviews and focus groups, the scholarly practitioner will gain an understanding of the obstacles present that hinder minority enrollment in advanced level classes. The methodology used in this study will reveal data results that will be helpful for

making changes to enrollment patterns that will offer minority students the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes. The findings of the research will be reported in the upcoming chapter and will illustrate what problems are associated with the lack of minority enrollment in advanced classes. The results will also provide the scholarly practitioner with the background to make changes to existing procedures and policies in order to level the playing field for all students and ensure that equitable practices are being utilized throughout Pride County Schools.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Over the last three years, the scholarly practitioner conducted a study to examine and to implement changes to increase minority enrollment in advanced programs and classes in a rural North Carolina School District. At Pride County High School, an analysis of three years of Powerschool data displayed that the majority of students enrolled in advanced programs and classes were White. Powerschool is student information management system used in many school districts in North Carolina that stores and houses student data. Some of the data contained in Powerschool includes attendance, grades, assignments and student reports. A three year data trend also indicated that there was a significant number of minority students eligible for enrollment in advanced classes, yet, they were not enrolled. At the time of the study, Pride County School District had a total student population of 1660 with the following ethnicities: 497 Black, 45 are Hispanic, 97 represent Multi-Race, seven American Indian, one Asian, one Native Hawaiian, and 1,012 White. According to data, minority enrollment in advanced classes does not appear to be proportional to the district population. The scholarly practitioner focused on advanced class enrollment at Pride County High School for this study. Pride County High School represented a total school staff comprised of one school principal, two assistant principals, two school counselors, one school social worker and 55 certified staff members. The principal and two assistant principals are White, both school counselors are White, one school social worker is Black and 98% of the total certified staff is White. The total number of staff at Pride County High School is not proportional to the diversity present within the student body.

The purpose of this study was to identify if there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes and use those findings to implement changes that will increase minority enrollment these classes. The scholarly practitioner used a mixed methods approach to address

the problem, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data results. The qualitative methods included the use of interviews and a focus group while the quantitative data collection involved employing surveys. Participants within this study included students in grades 10-12, teachers, school administrators, school counselors and parents. The scholarly practitioner gained valuable data from the participants by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in advanced classes?

2. How does the school district address disproportionality in advanced level classes?

3. How does professional development around equity affect the placement of students in advanced level classes?

Three-year historical data indicated that in grades 10-12, less than 10% of minority students were enrolled in advanced level classes at Pride High School, though they make up 30% of the school population. The instructional program in the Pride County School District includes general education, honors, AP and Special Education courses. The school district offer honors classes at the middle and high school level with the majority of honors classes at the high school level in the areas of English, math, history, and science. The data will be useful in developing a plan to increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes at Pride High School.

Research Sample

There was a total of 16 staff members who participated in this study representing both the school and district level. Research participants included five teachers, two school counselors, three Principals, one Assistant Principal, Career and Technical Education Coordinator (CTE), Child Nutrition Director, Technology Director, Positive Behavior Support and Intervention Support (PBIS) Coordinator and one Board Member as reflected in Table 6. The demographic

Table 6

Staff Members

Participant	Position	Number of Years in Education	Race
Participant I	School Principal	20 years	White
Participant II	Teacher	25 years	White
Participant III	Math Teacher	28 years	Black
Participant IV	PBIS Coordinator	15 years	Black
Participant V	Assistant Principal	10 years	White
Participant VI	Technology Director	25 years	White
Participant VII	School Principal	30 years	White
Participant VIII	School Principal	18 years	Black
Participant IX	EC Teacher/ Administrative Intern	15 years	Black
Participant X	School Counselor	30 years	White
Participant XI	Board Member	40 years	Black
Participant XII	School Counselor	5 years	White
Participant XIII	Child Nutrition Director	27 years	Black
Participant XIV	Teacher	30 years	White
Participant XV	CTE Director	25 years	White
Participant XVI	Teacher	10 years	White

breakdown of all Participants was comprised of 10 White participants and six Black participants. Additionally, there was a total of 332 years of experience in the field of education present among all participants. In addition, nine students participated in the study representing grades 10, 11 and 12 as indicated in Table 7. Student participants included seven Seniors, one Junior and one Sophomore. All student participants were students at Pride County High School and were currently enrolled in Honors classes or had been enrolled in Honors classes.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process consisted of a mixed methods approach whereby the scholarly practitioner used qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data included administering surveys to all participants while qualitative data consisted of conducting focus groups and engaging in individual interviews to seek an understanding for why there appears to be a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced programs and class in Pride County School District. Since the scholarly practitioner used Critical Race Theory as the Conceptual Framework for this study, using a mixed methods approach allowed the scholarly practitioner to explore if and how race and racism played a role in why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced programs and classes. All surveys were administered in an anonymous format in order to maintain confidentiality for all participants. In addition, all focus group and interview sessions were recorded to provide the researcher with the opportunity to transcribe answers for each question. All interviews and focus groups were completed virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not only did COVID-19 affect the manner in which we educate students, it also affected the data collection process for the Problem of Practice. The Problem of Practice is titled "Increasing Minority Participation in Advanced Programs and Classes in a Rural North Carolina

Table 7

Students

Participant	Position	Grade	Honors Classes
Participant A	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant B	Student	Junior	Yes
Participant C	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant D	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant E	Student	Sophomore	Yes
Participant F	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant G	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant H	Student	Senior	Yes
Participant I	Student	Senior	Yes

School District", and the data collection process involved a mixed methods approach of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The initial plan was to survey, interview and host focus group discussions in a face to face setting to gain a better understanding of how to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes. Instead, COVID-19 caused a shift from the original plan of engaging with participants in a face to face setting to holding interviews and focus groups using the Zoom platform in order to maintain social distancing and safety.

As a result, the student pool was smaller than originally planned because it was difficult to get students to respond to emails or phone calls. It was also hard to get parents to respond to phone calls. The positive side was that the student participants who responded were the ones who truly wanted to participate of their own free will and not because they felt they were being forced. Once student participants were confirmed, it was a hard task getting students and parents to attend the informational session on Zoom and the timeline that had been established had to be changed in order to gain permission from parents and get the necessary paperwork in place. Nevertheless, email and the U.S. Postal Service became a best friend to the scholarly practitioner because both of them were used to collect permission forms.

Once permissions were in place for students, dates had to be juggled with students to find a suitable time for all of them to meet as a group for the focus group, which was also held on Zoom. On the other hand, it was not difficult arranging dates and times for interviews because students were provided a list of dates and times and asked to select one. On the other hand, it was not hard to work with staff to arrange dates for surveys, focus groups and interviews because they were onsite daily and responded to emails in a timely and consistent manner.

As part of the research process, the plan was to visit at least two high schools in neighboring counties to interview the principal and curriculum director regarding their

enrollment of minority students in advanced classes. Of course, COVID-19 hindered the plan and the visits were unable to be made. Moreover, a Zoom meeting or conference call was not feasible because cooperating individuals were working from home and it was impossible to get a return phone call from either person. Gathering data was a bit of a challenge; however, it was not an impossible task nor was it an unpleasant experience. Building relationships with staff and students during this time was beneficial, gratifying and valuable.

Participants were assigned a unique identification by the scholarly practitioner in order to maintain confidentiality and ensure that the scholarly practitioner was able to identify each participant. Nvivo was used to analyze and transcribe recorded text from focus groups and interviews. Once all transcriptions were completed, the scholarly practitioner destroyed all audio recordings. As the scholarly practitioner examined the research data recurring words and similar quotes from participants were identified to establish emerging themes present within the answers to given questions. These themes emerged using an inductive method of analyzing the data. An inductive method of analysis allowed the scholarly practitioner to draw conclusions as to relevant themes present in answers to questions.

All staff participants completed a survey that was created by the scholarly practitioner as a google forms and addressed matters of disproportionality within the school setting. All survey questions were constructed by the scholarly practitioner and validated through a pilot test conducted by the scholarly practitioner. The survey was designed to assess if implicit bias played a role in the decisions made by staff members. Implicit bias is a factor associated with Critical Race Theory and plays a role in how race and racism tend to appear in the educational setting. Participants were asked a total of 10 questions in an anonymous fashion. The results yielded are found in Table 8. Staff participants received individual email notification from the scholarly

Table 8

Staff Survey Responses (Agree/Disagree)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I display high expectations for all students.	71.4%	28%		
I try to do what's best for all students.	85.7%	14.3%		
I view students as individuals and not stereotype them as part of some group.	71.4%	28.6%		
I believe in all students ability to learn.	92.9%	7.1%		
I work well with students from different backgrounds.	35.7%	64.3%		
Students in my school care about learning and getting a good education.	7.1%	85.7%	7.1%	
Students are offered academic offerings that meet their academic needs.	7.1%	92.9%		
All students are offered a challenging rigorous curriculum.	64.3%		35.7%	
I believe that student-teacher relationships are important and affect overall school success.	85.7%	14.3%		
I maintain an equitable learning environment that meets the needs of all students.	28.6%	57.1%	14.3%	

practitioner that the survey would be sent to them and should be completed within seven days of receipt. The survey was sent to a total of 16 staff participants for completion; however, only 14 completed it within the time requested. The scholarly practitioner used email as the platform for sending out the survey. Staff were asked a total of ten survey questions and asked to respond by choosing strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. When the scholarly practitioner reviewed the data, it was found that 92.9% of staff members believed that all students have the ability to learn, 85.7% believe that they try to do what's right for all students and 85.7% believe that student-teacher relationships are important and affect overall school success. On the other hand, 92.9% agreed that students are offered academic offerings that meet their academic needs and 85.7% thought that students in their school care about learning and getting good grades. The percentages were representative of areas that demonstrated the highest ratings within the questions in the area of strongly agree and agree. Nevertheless, the scholarly practitioner also found that there were no rating for strongly disagree and the ratings within disagree category were all 35.7% and less. It was interesting that some participants used the disagree rating and implied to the scholarly practitioner that honesty was being practiced when completing the survey. Furthermore, the scholarly practitioner believed that survey data showed that the majority of staff members believe they are providing academic opportunities and resources for all students. However, there were a few staff members who admitted that staff members did not offer challenging and rigorous environments for their students nor do some of them believe student-teacher relationships are vital to overall school success for students. In addition, some staff admitted that they did not maintain an equitable learning environment that meets the needs of all students.

In addition to the quantitative anonymous survey, a total of 13 staff members, one central office director and one Board member served as part of the focus group and were asked a series of questions related to the overall research questions as noted in Table 9.

Also, a total of two focus group interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform for a total of 90 minutes each. Based on the responses, the researcher was able to use coding to identify relevant themes that resonated within the answers from many of the participants. According to Strauss (1987), "Any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and easily. The excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding" (p. 27). The scholarly practitioner engaged in a question-and-answer cycle that provided the opportunity for staff to share their opinions and truths; however, it provided the scholarly practitioner the opportunity to hear the constant use of repetitive words and language that formulated and identified themes that spoke to the nature of questions. Focus group questions collected data for study questions one, two and three. Some of the themes derived from the focus group questions are addressed in the results.

Staff Focus Group Results

Advocacy

One theme that emerged from the focus group discussion was advocacy. Most participants shared their commitment to advocating for their students to make sure they were offered opportunities to meet their needs. Strategies used for advocacy included talking to students, helping students to understand their choices, informing parents and the community of academic opportunities and knowing what opportunities were available for students.

"I am a pusher in the community and in the home" (Participant IV).

Table 9

Research Questions

Question	Answer
I. How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in gifted classes?	Answers to this research question will demonstrate if and how current district policies and procedures hinders minority student enrollment in advanced programs and classes. The question will also show how the tenants of race and racism in Critical Race Theory affect the placement of minority students in advanced programs and classes.
II. How does the school district address disproportionality in advanced programs and classes?	In order to determine how to increase minority participation in advanced programs and classes, it is important to understand how disproportionality plays a role in advanced programs and classes and how the school district currently addresses it.
III. How does the understanding of equity affect the placement of students for advanced classes?	Equity means providing students with the individual skills and resources they need to be academically success in the classroom environment. Therefore, it is important for school staff to understand what equity is and how it plays a role in the educational environment. If school staff are not aware of what equity is, they may be prone to overlook minority students for advanced programs and classes.

"I try to make sure people in the community know what opportunities are

available for students" (Participant IX).

Participants also thought it was important to evaluate transcripts and look at different forms of criteria in order to advocate students adequately. According to Participant I "We use EVAAS data to find missing students" Participant VII shared that speaking positive is helping students to understand their choices in order to build strong foundations were also shared as methods used to advocate for students. Advocacy should take place in the community as well as the home in order to show a well-rounded view of support to helping all students meet their educational needs (Participant IX). Although most participants advocated for their students to enroll in honors classes, there were other individuals who felt that more could be done to advocate for students by engaging in conversations, sharing information, and being persistent. "I often hit a brick wall" with students, which causes me to not reach out as much as I should" (Participant X). Also, Participant IV stated that all is a strong word and all may not know what opportunities are available; therefore, we should continue to advocate for students.   It takes a team working together to make sure student academic needs are met. It is also important to note that advocacy requires a time of reflection and working to improve efforts and outcomes for students.

Obligation

Secondly, the theme of obligation resonated as student discussions continued. Some staff participants shared that they do not feel that they meet with students as often as they should for different reasons. Participants cited reasons such as not having enough time, something else always being in the way, or some teachers need to have more of an openness to meet with students on an individual basis. Nonetheless, participants believed that they were obligated to support students in whatever way they could to make sure their needs were met. "We don't

always get a chance to meet with the students who are on the academically strong spectrum" (Participant V). By engaging in this practice, educators may be sending the message that students who are academically strong do not need a great deal of support. However, some participants cited COVID as a reminder that all students may need additional support as they transition back to the face-to-face setting. Students who were academically strong as well as those who were not academically strong may need additional support in the classroom setting. Furthermore, participants agreed that they want to see their students successful and are willing to support them in any way necessary.

Educators may feel a sense of obligation to ensure that students are provided with resources they need to become academically successful. There are times where staff may find themselves obligating more time to one group versus another group without being fully aware. According to Participant XII, "we tend to spend more time with Seniors." School counselors acknowledged that they spend more time with Seniors to make sure they are on track to graduate but also noted that they have to spread their time around to work with all students. Participant IV stated that "sometimes kids get lost in the cracks and sometimes they blossom as a result of not meeting with them on a regular basis." All participants believed that it is important to meet with students and they need to do a better job of obligating more time to meet individually with students.

Interest and Motivation

The themes of interest and motivation seem to prevail throughout discussions because participants expressed that students are not always aware of opportunities present and when they are aware, they show little to no interest in being involved. Participant X shared that "students do not always take advantage of the programs available as much as they should." Moreover,

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Participant I replied that "underrepresented students are not always made aware of the opportunities available, so they do not participate." As educators, we have to "practice equity and make sure we push our underrepresented groups of students to participate in programs that will help them to become well-rounded students" (Participant IV). There are times where students may need someone to advocate for them and give them the push they need to become motivated and interested to participate in cultural and academic offering that will enhance them academically. According to Participant XIV "we must do a better job of informing all students of programs and opportunities that will help them to become culturally aware and prepared." Allowing students to be involved in the decision-making process and giving them the chance to have a voice in what opportunities are offered to them may help to build interest and motivation among students who lack in those areas. Many program staffers have the potential to serve as a change agent for students if students are allowed to participate. "Student Government Association (SGA) made a difference in the lives of some students despite the fact that they were not the chosen ones to serve in SGA or anything else at the school level" (Participant VIII). School principals agreed that extra curricula activities such as Student Government Association, sports, and other clubs may be inviting to those who stray from becoming active in school.

Mentoring students was also cited as a way to develop motivation and interest in students who are unmotivated. Genesis emerged as a dominant mentoring program at the K-5 level for underrepresented populations of students. Genesis is geared toward identifying and serving at-risk male and female students ages eight to 18. The goal of the program is to provide academic assistance, improve social skills, offer cultural exposure, work on vocational skills and support students to become well-rounded citizens who are prepared to function in society. Additionally, staff who work at the middle and high school level all agreed that mentoring programs such as

Central Stars, Boys to Men, and Just us Girls and academic support programs such as Upward Bound, Math Science and Education Network (MSEN), Saunders Science Scholars, and Women in Math are all programs that appeal to underrepresented populations of students and help to build character and confidence. These programs create interest in students and may serve as motivating factors for them to be involved.

Consistency

Consistency arose within the discussions involving student scheduling and parents being made aware of what they child may or may qualify to enroll in. Most participants agreed that parents are not involved in comprising their student schedules. Students do not get to select their core classes but they do choose their elective classes. "Students can choose their elective courses but not their core courses; instead, they can come out in the summer to make schedule changes" (Participant X). This practice of scheduling was also utilized in middle school. Furthermore, Participant VIII expressed that "parents don't get a lot of input into their child's schedule." This answer brought out a great deal of discussion on how the current manner schedules are created may need to be changed in order to be fair to students and parents. Furthermore, Participant V shared that sometimes "it depends on the family and their participation in education" as to how much information is shared. Also, Participant V shared that she has a son who does not always have the grades to enroll in an honors class but she pushes him to do so. Nevertheless, many participants were concerned that educators often know how to guide their children and help them to navigate into the classes they want and need but what happens to the student whose parent is not an educator?

Participants, who were also parents, agreed that parents do not get to choose courses until they are already chosen (Participant IV). Speaking the same language and practicing the same

procedures across the district is important and it sends the message that everyone is unified. Policies and procedures for how student schedules are composed may need to be revisited in order to accommodate parent input according to Participant VIII. Participants believed it was important to adhere to consistent practices and policies for all students in order to establish equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Effective Communication and Building Relationships

Effective communication was another theme that stood out as it relates to helping students establish their education goals. Most participants agreed that taking the time to talk with students and make them aware of the opportunities available to them was an important piece. "Counselors are the bridge to the real world and we guide students and help them" according to Participate XII. Participant IV shared that in Flight School, there was constant communication with students about what their goals are for the future." Providing effective communication helps to keep students informed and it also helps to build equitable environments that are transparent.

In addition, building relationships was also identified as an important part of supporting students in their educational journey. "We have to build a culture for high school staff to build relationships with students" (Participant V). Participants all agreed that fostering relationships with students provided an outlet to learn the student and offer advocacy for him or her based on what his/her needs are. Participant V also stated that freshman mentee programs are in place to support our students. Although most participants responded and agreed with the need for effective communication and building relationships to be a part of school culture, some participants chose not to respond.

Access and Opportunity

When discussing whether or not the school system was meeting the meeting the needs of all students, themes of access and opportunity was a vital part of the conversation. Some participants shared that they do not believe the school system is meeting the needs of all students. "We teach to the middle and sometimes we do things without realizing it" according to Participant VII. Participant VIII stated that when she came back to Pride County School System, she was surprised at the lack of resources and technology available for student use. Other participants felt that we do well with our students who are on the College and Career Ready track but were concerned about those students who are on the vocational track? "We are missing a whole population of students and we need to address this concern in order to accommodate for our students who will not go to college" (Participant IV).

Participants felt that it was important to know how to meet student needs because all students should have access to a quality education. Participant VI shared a personal experience relative to a class he teaches at the community college. He informed others that the students were on the vocational track and as a result, they fed off each other and helped each other to succeed. He stated that he had a mixture of students in his class consisting of academic "high flyers" as well as non-academic students. Academic high-flyers is a term used in education to identify students who are on the honors track and usually excel at high levels in the classroom. High flyers are the ones who are independent workers who do not require much assistance from the teacher and they score levels four and five on end of grade and course tests while exemplifying a desire to stand out in the classroom and be academically successful. Nonetheless, Participant IV believed that students gained valuable knowledge from being exposed to hands on learning and having the benefit of working with their peers. Students had a range of academic ability, worked

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well with others and had a desire to be successful. "I think it is important to understand that all students are different and require different academic settings to be successful; therefore, the school system should consider the needs of students and plan courses accordingly" (Participant VI). Creating access and opportunity for all students gives them a chance to be successful in the manner that works best for them.

Participant VIII shared that the budget causes barriers, but we could still do a better job than what we do in meeting the needs of our students. Furthermore, Participant III expressed that she believes all students can learn but there needs to be more in place to support all students including occupational students who sometimes are not provided a quality education. This was a popular statement among participants because many of them believe that the school system is educating students based on norms of the past and not focusing on what individual needs are. Lack of access and opportunity also includes identifying barriers that hindered student learning such as socio-economic concerns, racial disparities, lack of understanding, and lack of support. Most participants felt strongly that more resources need to be made available to all students. "Resources need to go to all students, not just certain groups" (Participant III). According to Participant IV, some students have a language barrier and are not able to communicate in the classroom, which causes a barrier to learning. Unfortunately, these students don't always get the resources they need because they are not advocating for themselves. Participant IV stated that "minority parents want the same opportunities for their children as other parents; therefore, we should not stereotype anyone and assume we know what their desires are." Participant IV stressed that some people have low expectations towards minority students, which causes them to get pushed to the back and shown no attention. As a result, lack of access and opportunity gaps tend to widen and cause minority students to continually miss academic offerings that may

help to enhance them academically. For example, Participant III expressed that "the Student Government Association does not always have African American and Hispanic representation and if we are serious about equity, it needs to be present in all areas." All students want to feel as if they matter in the school setting and should have the chance to be considered and participate in academic and non-academic offerings.

Ownership

Ownership is a theme that continually arose during discussions. In order to change anything, we must first admit that there is a problem. When discussing what can be do done to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes, we have to first acknowledge that minority students are absent from those classes. According to Participant IV, " the data indicate that minority students are absent from honors classes; therefore, if we are going to work on improving, we have to be willing to have courses in place that don't require personal or teacher recommendations and we need to learn how to display some compassion towards our students." Also, " We have to have more conversations to make people aware instead of just pulling together a group of Black employees to figure it out" as shared by Participant IX. Creating equitable learning environments for all students is not just a Black employees concern, it is a concern for all races.

There has to be a longing to see minority students enrolled in advanced classes. "Sometimes we just need to look at the teacher according to Participant III or "maybe we just need to begin looking outside the box to increase minority enrollment" according to Participant X. We have to be willing to have honest conversations that will help to make changes that will create equitable learning environments for all students. Participant I ask the question "are we highlighting our students who have been successful in classes or in sports or in clubs. "For

example, "When we have Awards ceremonies at school, minority students are not represented" (Participant I). Participants asks if we are ready, as teachers, to own the notion that our minority students are not showing up in advanced classes nor are they showing up in other areas of school life. Participant III stated that "Sometimes we need to look at the teacher; let's just be real." Participant III shared that we cannot make changes until we are all ready to own our part for why minority students may not be enrolling in advanced classes or participating in school level activities. Accepting ownership means individuals have to be willing to see themselves and accept what they see. Once ownership is realized, people can begin the process of having open and honest conversations about where we go from here to bring change that will be vital to all students.

Staff Interview Data Analysis

As the scholarly practitioner engaged in individual interviews with staff members, answers provided lead to the development of relevant themes that addressed individual questions. Moreover, there were recurring themes of advocacy and lack of access and opportunity that were also noted.

Exposure

When interviewing staff members, the theme of exposure stood out because participants agreed that advanced level classes were aligned with college level courses and provided the opportunity for students to gain academic knowledge that will help them to be successful in college. Most participants believe that background knowledge from previous classes is necessary for students to be successful in college classes and advanced level classes allow for that exposure. "It gives them prior knowledge to be successful; if they don't have the base knowledge, college courses will be harder" (Participant XV).

All participants agreed that exposure was beneficial for students, especially those who will matriculate into post-secondary education; however, some participants did not feel that some of the advanced level classes had enough rigor included to prepare students for college. "I did not feel that I was prepared when I graduated and left Pride County for college because I never had to write a research paper in my advanced classes" according to Participant VIII. Additionally, "Dual enrollment classes give a convoluted perception of what rigor should be" (Participant I). Participants agreed that the topic of exposure is one that should be discussed with district and school staff to ensure that everyone understands what exposure means and how to achieve it within the academic setting. Since Pride County Public School District is located in a rural part of Northeastern North Carolina, exposing students to academic and cultural opportunities will broaden their thinking and vision for themselves. For example, there is a program in Pride County Schools named Saunders Science Scholars that was created from a collaborative partnership between the school district and Morehead Planetarium, which is a part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This program is focused on STEM and gave students' academic exposure and cultural exposure that they had not had before due to living and being educated in Pride County School District. This program offers Saturday academies, STEM activities, cultural outings, personal laptops and hot spots for each student, and the opportunity to attend a four-year university free of charge after their graduation as long as they adhere to the university admission requirements. Adopting similar ideas and forming additional partnerships with the community will help to give students exposure that will support their academic goals.

Advocacy

As students progress through school, they are not always able to advocate for themselves and have to rely on others around them to look out for their best interest or speak out on their

behalf. Advocacy emerged as a major theme based on the responses from the participants. Many agreed that educators should be willing to look past negative behavior and focus on a student's academic ability because all students should have the same educational opportunities. According to Participant XIV, "Sometimes their behavior might come from being bored or from being in a lower level class and we need to give them a chance to grow."

Some participants admitted that students academic history should play a role in whether they are allowed to enroll in advanced classes but did not believe that behavior should be a determining factor for whether a student enrolls in advanced classes or not. Unfortunately, other participants agreed that behavior does play a role in the selection of minority students for advanced classes. If a student is a discipline issue, that student is often overlooked for advanced level classes regardless of their academic ability. "Three years ago, a female minority student was overlooked for advanced classes because of her behavior" (Participant I). "If we are looking at teacher recommendations, teachers aren't going to recommend those students who misbehave" according to Participant IX. If students are overlooked for advanced classes based on their behavior, educators should consider stepping in to become advocates for students. "From my own personal experience, "If a student has good behavior, a minority student will be seen as a perfect selection for all advanced classes but if a minority student has questionable behavior, he or she is put on the back burner"
(Participant IV). When students are not in a position to advocate for themselves, someone else has to pick up the mantle and advocate for them. In practicing equity, we have to be willing to find alternative methods of enrollment to support students who are academically able to enroll in advanced classes but may have behavior concerns that causes teachers to look past them.

Negative stigmas are associated with students who are perceived to have questionable behavior. "Once minority students get a stigma, it follows them and they may not be offered an advanced class" (Participant XV). Nonetheless, some participants did not believe that they allowed behavior to have a negative impact regarding their selection of minority students into advanced classes and they were likely to look beyond behavior and give students a chance if they demonstrated the ability to be successful. "For me, behavior is not necessarily a concern and I welcome behavior concerns because I have classroom management skills" (Participant II). Overall, staff see themselves as facilitators, teachers, parents, counselors and whatever necessary to help students. Advocating for students means being able to accept them for who they are and not allowing personalities, attitudes or anything outside of the academic realm to interfere with the educational opportunities they are offered.

Lack of Access and Opportunity

Academic performance plays a major role for minority students as to whether they enroll in an advanced class or not. As responses were shared, the theme of access stood out among the participants. Minority students tend to be denied access to advanced classes because teachers focus mainly on academic performance with no consideration for the potential a child may possess. "We have generally looked at grades, not potential which means we may be overlooking some students; we probably need to expand our net in the school system" (Participant XV). "Minority students cannot just be good students; instead, they have to be great students who stand out in the eyes of the adults in the building; in a sense, they have to be able to sell themselves by convincing teachers that they can do the work regardless of what they look like on paper" (Participant IX). "You have to know the rules of the game and minority students don't know the rules of the game" (Participant IX). Access and opportunity appears to only be

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available for those who know how to play the game, know the right people and do not cause any trouble according to Participant IX. "Grades play a big role; however, who you are also plays a big role for minority students" (Participant XI).

On the other hand, some participants agreed that all students should be treated fairly but grades should be the basis for entrance into advanced classes, "There should be an equal playing field for all students" (Participant XVI). "Students can request advanced classes if they have the grades from previous classes to qualify" (Participant XII). It is important that students are held accountable for their learning; however, it is also important that they are provided access to all academic offerings that will help them to be successful in school and in life.

Furthermore, the theme of opportunity was also present within the responses provided by the participants. Students should be given the chance to succeed academically. Since we believe that all students are different and have varying learning styles, the opportunities they are offered should differ as well. Not only should the opportunities vary, the tools used to measure their success should be different. A variety of methods are used to progress monitor academic achievement for students such as progress reports, report cards, student conferences, mentor programs, EVAAS, and pre/post tests. "Counselors pull reports and sit down with students to find out what's going on" (Participant I). "More academic checks are in place for EC, AIG, etc"(Participant XIV). "Pride County High School is very successful because we take that extra effort to monitor students" (Participant XV).The exhaustive list of progress monitoring tools provides students with the opportunity to show academic achievement. "We tend to look at the gaps in progress monitoring" (Participant VII). "The hope is that teachers are using the data to consistently navigate and monitor student performance" (Participant IX).

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Providing access and opportunity to students is a team effort that requires transparency from everyone. Knowing what student data looks like is a vital piece of information that may be helpful in ensuring access and opportunity for all students. Staff can challenge themselves to make sure they are prepared to help students achieve their common goal of gaining an equitable education.

Encouragement and Denial

Answers varied among participants when discussing recruitment methods, no recruitment at all, or serving as a parent liaison to spread the word about advanced opportunities for students. The responses yielded for recruitment caused the emergence of two themes. The first theme is that of encouragement and is shared by some participants. Participant IV made the statement that "minority students don't always seek information and sometimes they don't know and neither do their parents." According to Participant V, minority students are not always abreast of what they can or cannot do, therefore, encouragement from teachers and other staff members plays a vital role in their decision to take or not take an advanced class. Interestingly, minority student participants seemed more concerned with reaching out to other minority students and sharing information with them as well as encouraging them to enroll in advanced classes, while Caucasian participants made it clear that they talked and encouraged all students. Participant IX, who is an African American female stated, "I try to be a parent liaison to inform student and parents and because of the relationship I have with Black male students, I encourage them to be in honors classes. Participant IV, who is an African American female stated "as the lab facilitator for the past five years, I have gone out of my way to talk with minority students and parents about taking college and career courses and making sure the awareness piece is in place."

On the other hand, responses received from White educators seem to show a lack of awareness for the need to recruit minority students thus causing a theme of denial to occur. For example, Participant II shared that I have never really done a lot of recruiting", while Participant XVI stated that I have not done much recruitment; instead, I base my decision more off the previous year" (Participant XVI). Some participants were comfortable sharing that they engaged in talks with all students, not just minority students. Participants did not believe they needed to do anything special for any minority group. "From the counseling side of things, I try to find out what student plans are after high school as well as identify their interests and help them based on their answers; this is what happens for all students stated Participant XII. Interestingly enough was the response received from Participant I, who serves as principal, and is responsible for setting the vision for the school. According to Participant I, "I talk to all students, not just minority students; if I have a rapport with students, I'll talk to them." Nonetheless, he also shared that he deals with students on a case-by-case basis and does not have a lot of contact with students about courses (Participant I). He did not appear to understand the need to have a relationship with students or help in the recruitment process for minority students. The principal admitted that he needs to do a better job with reaching out to students and encouraging them.

Perseverance

Most participants seemed diligent in their efforts to retain minority students in advanced classes. Staff members were willing to confer with students, progress monitor students, involve parents and ensure that the curriculum is interesting and engaging in order to retain students in advanced classes. Perseverance was a relevant theme expressed within responses. "I am on them; I check report cards, share my educational story with them, encourage them and display high expectations for minority students" according to Participant IV. Participant XIV shared that "if

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minority students are misbehaving in my class, I do everything I can to keep them in class; some kids need a little extra" and Participant XII believes that as educators, we have to "understand that just because a student doesn't catch on quickly doesn't mean they can't do it." Giving up on students should not be an option; instead, the focus should be on setting the example for what true perseverance looks like.

Unity

The theme of unity played a role within the responses provided because policies change when individuals are able to come together and work together and make decisions that benefit students. "Communication is big, we have to start talking to each other a little more" according to Participant VII. Some participants were not aware of the district's policies but those who were aware believed that the district's policies need to be revamped to reach a larger pool of students. "Need to think about extensions for how we can better serve our students" (Participant IV). According to Participant XIV, "Policies should constantly re-evaluate students and be reflective of the whole school system" (Participant XIV). The best models to follow at times are the ones that have demonstrated proven change; therefore, looking at other districts will create another lens to look through and evaluate equity and how it is being achieved in other school districts. Working together in unity will help to establish policies and procedures that are consistent with the vision for the school district. Participant XI responded by saying "personally, we should not only look at our policies but look at the different districts around to see what they are doing. There is no room for individuals working in isolation and not communicating with others. Instead, the school district should explore the possibility of including representation from all staff for decision-making times in order to achieve unity and allow various individuals to take

ownership and share accountability for how students are educated. In addition, Unity offers the opportunity to come together and work collectively to support change for all students.

Students Survey Data Analysis

While staff contributed valued responses to all survey, focus group and interview questions, students brought another set of responses based on their viewpoint. Nine student participants were asked to complete a survey consisting of 15 questions in an anonymous fashion. Students were asked to rate each question as strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. In the strongly agree area, 88.9% was the highest rating given by students. Survey results demonstrated that 88.9% of students strongly agreed that they have parental support at home. In the agree category, 88.9% was the highest rating given. Survey results revealed that students agreed that the school did a good when asked if creativity was valued at their school, did teachers understand and respect them as students, and were opportunities present for students to enroll in classes that were challenging. Additionally, student responses in the area of disagree displayed the highest rating of 55.6% in two areas when students were asked is students were being prepared for after high school and were advanced classes offered to all students. Furthermore, in the strongly disagree agree area, 33.3% was the highest rating demonstrated when students were asked if everyone respects all races and cultures at their school. Overall, the strongly disagree category yielded four ratings from students ranging from 33.3% to 11.1% indicating that students did not have a great deal of negativity to express about any of the questions asked. Overall survey results demonstrated that students believe their teachers and counselors have their best interest at heart. However, it can be assumed that students displayed honesty in their answers in an effort to be transparent. All survey results are found in Table 10.

Table 10

Student Survey (Agree/Disagree)

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school offers a curriculum that challenges students?		66.7%	33.3%	
My teachers and administrators value what I have to say?		77.8%	22.2%	
At my school, everyone respects all races and cultures.		44.4%	22.2%	33.3%
Students care about learning and getting a good education.		77.8%	22.2%	
Creativity is valued at my school.	11.1%	88.9%		
Students are being prepared for after high school.		22.2%	55.6%	22.2%
My teachers have high expectations for all students.		44.4%	44.4%	11.1%
My teachers make me feel that I am a valuable part of their classes.		88.9%	11.1%	
Advanced classes are offered to all students.		22.2%	55.6%	22.2%
My teachers understand and respect me as a student.	11.1%	88.9%		
Teachers encourage me to do my very best.		100%		
My classes are interesting and challenging.		55.6%	44.4%	
I participate in class on a regular basis.		44.4%	55.6%	
My teachers and counselors talk with me about maintaining good academic performance.		66.7%	33.3%	
My counselor takes an interest in my career plans and helps me to attain them.		44.4%	33.3%	22.2%

Secondly, students participated in focus group discussion that offered them the opportunity to share their perspectives in a number of areas related to the research questions that provide a baseline for the research. A total of 7 students participated in the focus group and all were given the opportunity to engage in conversations surrounding each question. As a result of responses given by participants, the researcher identified relevant themes for each question. Focus group questions and their results are as follows.

Student Focus Group Data Analysis

Advocacy

The theme of advocacy or the lack thereof was present within student responses. According to student responses, there was no advocacy from school staff for them to enroll in advanced classes and the decision was left up to students. Students also stated that no one approached them about taking advanced classes despite their grade point averages ranging from 3.5 to 4.0. Students share that they believed many other students would enroll in advanced classes if staff were to take the time to talk with them. On the other hand, parents served as advocates for their students while students advocated for themselves. Participant A said "my mom made me take Honor classes because she knew I could handle it." In addition, Participant B stated that she would not have enrolled in an honors class if it has not been for her mother pushing her to do so. All participants agreed that parents were the driving force for students enrolling in advanced classes along with personal desire on the part of the student. Most students also shared that they were fortunate to know how to advocate for themselves and to have parents who advocate for them, but they were concerned about the students who may not speak up for themselves, causing them to lose the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes. Participant A stated "I spent some time talking to one of my friends about why he never took an Honors class

because I thought he was certainly smart enough but I realize that some Black students don't think they are smart enough." Advocacy can be a strong tool to support student choices. Additionally, Participant A also shared that "sometimes I the only Black boy in my Honors class because most advanced classes at this school have White student enrolled. Nonetheless, the consensus among all participants was that they needed to learn how to advocate for themselves and make decisions for that would support their future goals. Furthermore, participants demonstrated the initiative to enroll in advanced classes and engage in academic opportunities that would help them. "A lot of Black students are discouraged from taking advanced classes" (Participants F). Doubt and discouragement seem to play a major role in the lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes. Often times, students may need an extra push from family and school staff in order to succeed and not allow doubt and discouragement to set in.

Resiliency

Most participants stated that they would have enrolled in advanced class even though no one approached them about it because they wanted to make sure they were able to get admitted into college and make a good life for themselves. Resiliency stood out as a theme based on student responses. "I have always taken honors classes and it would feel weird not to take them" (Participant A). Participants made academic decisions for themselves that they felt was in their best interest. They took the time to seek out information and followed through with enrollment in advanced classes despite receiving little to no support from school staff. Resiliency caused participants to engage in activities and classes that were in their best interest regardless of what others thought. Mindset was identified as a factor for why some students may not enroll in advanced classes as well as a reason for why some staff members may not encourage students to enroll in advanced classes. Participant A concluded that mindset is "the way you think, and the

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level of self-determination a person has." Often times, people have to believe that they can be successful in order to take a chance on themselves and they have to have a made up mind to engage in risk-taking activities such as advanced classes. According to Participant A, "not allowing myself to fail even though I know others don't want me here", was important to him. Participants were not willing to allow anyone to dictate what they could or could not do in life. They believed that they were able to do anything they put their mind and heart to. All participants shared that they push themselves constantly to do their best and they were willing to step outside the box and enroll in courses that would challenge their thinking skills. Overall, students expressed the desire to be better regardless of what others think.

Acceptance

Most participants agreed that a balanced class does matters; however, participants said that they would still enroll in advanced classes with no balance because they interact and get along well with all races. Participant F stated, " I'm still gonna take the class regardless of whether I am encouraged to or not". Nonetheless, all participants expressed a desire to see more minority students in advanced classes. "I would like to see more Black people but it doesn't matter" according to Participant H. Additionally, Participant A stated "it probably doesn't matter to them (counselors) so it doesn't matter to students." The theme of acceptance played out in talking about a balanced class. Participants believed it was easier to accept the status quo than make changes to improve student achievement.

"I believe that Black students are not seen as the same as White students", stated Participant H. When discussing acceptance, participants believed that race was a factor in whether or not minority students were treated the same in the school environment. Most participants saw race as an issue in their classes and in the school. "African American students

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get harsher punishment than White students" according to Participant B. Also, Participant A believed that "Black males were expected to disrupt class and they were presumed to be very aggressive." Nonetheless, participants thought it would be helpful if people would accept others for who they are regardless of their skin color.

Trust

Some participants believe they have a small number of teachers they can talk to if necessary, while others do not believe they have anyone they can talk to. The lack of trust emerged as a reason why some of them did not think they had anyone they could talk to. "I have a couple of teachers I can talk to; I have one teacher in particular that has pushed me to do my best" (Participant A). Furthermore, Participant C shared that "there are some teachers I can talk to but I take it home because teachers gossip and I don't want them in my business." Participants shared that some teachers talk about students, which sends a negative message to other students.

Encouragement

Participants believe that school administration does a good job with making sure the school is operated correctly and students are provided resources and opportunities; however, there was room for improvement. Encouragement stood out as a theme when participants were asked how school administrators could improve things. "Believe in your students and give more encouragement" according to Participant H. They would like for school staff to be more encouraging, believe in your students and be more proactive with Black students in terms of enrolling them in advanced classes. Participant A thought it was important to "realize that just as there is a stereotype for Black men, there is also a stereotype for Black women."

There were many participants who believe that school administrators could do more but they do not because of how some staff members would feel. Participant F shared that "the discouragement for Black students to be in advanced classes starts early and school administrators need to address this factor early." There are times when school administrators should take more of an active role in reviewing data and making sure student academic needs are met. The responsibility for student enrollment should not solely rest with school counselors. "Administrators could be more proactive with African American students in terms of enrolling them in honors classes" (Participant C). At the end of the day, participants want school administrators to have confidence in their students and not base everything on being Black or White (Participant A). Participants want school administrators to encourage students to be their best, spend time with students and build relationships with them, and take an interest in their students.

In addition to the survey and the focus group, 6 students also participated in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. Participants were asked a total of ten questions and their responses allowed the scholarly practitioner to determined dominant themes that addressed each question. Themes found from student discussions are listed in the student interview data analysis.

Student Interview Data Analysis

Relationships

Participants agreed that student teacher relationships are very important and help students to stay on track. Participant A made the statement that "teachers make students feel more confident and important and they also help to fill the gaps of parents." Also, Participant B shared that "relationships are important and teachers teach better when they know their students" Some participants believed that having one adult they could talk to at school was important and gave

them a sense of security while at school. Students spend a great deal of time at school and see the school culture as one similar to family.

On the other hand, some participants believe that student teacher relationships should be kept to a minimum to avoid problems. Participant H believed that "relationships should stop at a certain point before it gets more personal than it should be." Participant E shared that "some teachers have favorites and it makes it difficult to trust them because they do not seem to care about any students except their favorite ones. Students respect teachers and want to have relationships with them but it is not always easy. Trust has to be earned from both parties and when one breaches it, things may never be the same. Participants expressed that they know when teachers truly care about them versus when they view them as just another student in class. Nonetheless, trust is vital to the student-teacher relationship.

Support

Discussing student experiences was definitely something that all participants engaged in with their friends. Most participants believed that Black students needed to stick together in advanced classes because they were few in number. Participant F spoke candidly about her experiences and expressed that "In honors classes, I am usually the only Black student and I feel that I am just there, not always seen or heard and by myself" (Participant F). She thought teachers could do more to make the experience more pleasurable for all students, especially Black students. Teachers do not have to cater to Black students but they should make them feel accepted and wanted in advanced classes. "I'm the only Black boy in here! The other students stopped taking honors classes after tenth grade because they didn't think it was cool" (Participant A). The consensus among participants was that support is necessary for students to be academically successful in class and the support should begin with the teacher. Also, participants

felt that it was important to have mentor programs in place to support students and serve as the middle entity that brings a fresh perspective to any situation and can help students. Some students want to be in advanced classes until they actually enroll in them and realize what the expectations are. Participant H stated that "some like it and some don't; students think they can do the work until they get in the class and they want to go to a regular class." Continued support for students will offer a sense of confidence to students.

Thankfulness

Thankfulness was another theme that stood out within student discussions. Most participants were very appreciative of the academic opportunities they have been given. Participant C "feels that the school system has done well with offering opportunities", while Participant A believed that teachers made sure he was offered more opportunities." Although participants wanted to see change take place to make sure other minority students were offered academic offering to meet their needs, they were very appreciative of the opportunities they had been afforded. "I am appreciative of the opportunities and I feel like the school system has done well with offering opportunities" (Participant C). Although participants believed there was work that needed to be done to establish equity for all students, they exemplified gratefulness for the academic opportunities they had been offered.

Nevertheless, two participants stressed that they had mixed feelings on academic opportunities offered to them and thought they had not been offered all the opportunities they believe they should have been given. "I have been trying to get in the Academically Gifted program since middle school and I feel like I'm missing out" according to Participant F. In addition, Participant F said that she usually had to seek out opportunities herself." Even though all participants did not think they had received equitable treatment, they were still thankful for

the opportunities provided to them. They were more concerned with making sure other students were able to take advantage of all resources available to them.

Heritage

Wanting to make parents proud and exceed their expectation was important to participants. As a result, the theme of heritage was prevalent based on student discussion. Parents, self-motivation and their future were motivating factors for all participants to enroll in advanced classes. "Trying to take advantage of opportunities my parents never had" made a difference for me" (Participant F). She stressed that her parents did not have many opportunities and she wanted to take advantage of the ones offered to her. According to Participant B, her mother was her influence to enroll in an advanced level class and she wanted to make her proud.

Unity

Motivation, support and a listening ear were all supports described by participants as ones they received from their parents. Participant C shared that both of her parents have been willing to stay up late with her and help and support her. Additionally, Participant B shared that "I can count on my family for help and motivation." Parental support was important to all participants and they stressed that they could not imagine what it would be like if they did not have the support of their family. Participants also embraced the idea of unity within their family structures and liked how their family all worked together to make sure they experienced academic success. "I can count on my family for encouragement because I get frustrated at times; my friends in honors classes also provide support to each other" (Participant F). Participants wanted to see unity displayed in the classroom in order to provide a structure of support for all students. All participants were willing to support each other and had the support of their parents as well in order to achieve academic success.

Action Research

In order to achieve the goal of increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes in Pride County School District, the scholarly practitioner focused on what measures would be beneficial to achieving success. As a result, the scholarly practitioner implored the use of Action Research Cycles I, II and III to identify steps taken to increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes in Pride County School District.

Action Research Cycle I

Action Research Cycle I included all participants completing surveys, interviews and focus group discussion. Participants included school principals, teachers, board member, district staff, school counselors and several central office directors. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and used to make decisions regarding how to move forward with planning. Afterward the scholarly practitioner gathered all data and transcribed it. Additionally, the scholarly practitioner reviewed various pieces of student data to gain an understanding of the enrollment process and how it affected minority students. Data was examined for the 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 school year to compare enrollment numbers for minority students in advanced level classes. Some of the data reviewed included class rosters, demographic information, and EVAAS. Since the scholarly practitioner was not able to travel to schools in the surrounding counties to converse with staff members about their success with minority enrollment in advanced classes, she called two districts and engaged in a conversation with the Director of Curriculum for one school district and the Principal for another. The results of the phone call yielded that both districts were having the same concern and were working to put a plan in place to address the issue.

Additionally, the scholarly practitioner formed a Race and Ethnic Advisory Council that was tasked with ensuring that all students were offered an equitable education. The Advisory Council consisted of two principals, two school counselors, one PBIS Coordinator, one Exceptional Children's Director, one AIG Coordinator, one Testing and Accountability Coordinator, one Board member, two teachers, one superintendent, five students and the scholarly practitioner. All members of the Advisory Council work directly with students or have a great impact and influence on student learning. Meetings occur once each month unless there is a need to meet more. The Race and Ethnic Advisory Council will seek information from surrounding school districts on how they handle equity in their school system. Achieving equity in advanced classes is a major concern for the Advisory Council and they were willing to engage in a variety of trainings that will educate the school district on equity.

Moreover, the scholarly practitioner met with the AIG Coordinator to discuss student data for grades 3-12, which included student demographics along with grade level and historical test data. Data was examined for any disparities that may be present. The scholarly practitioner looked at the previous three years of AIG data to see if recurring patterns and trends were present. It was also suggested that the AIG Coordinator seek information to determine how other school districts are handing placement and equity.

Previous professional development offerings were reviewed by the scholarly practitioner to determine what additional forms of professional development will benefit the school district. Along with looking at trainings, the scholarly practitioner also examined walk through classroom observation tools to see if equity was listed as a component for review. The superintendent was made aware of all actions taking place in order to maintain transparency and support.

Action Research Cycle II

Action Research Cycle II involves changes implemented based on data gained in Action Research Cycle I. As a result of data examined in Action Research Cycle I, many practices have begun. Equity training for the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council has begun because members thought it was important for the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council to be trained first to ensure they are ready to create and recommend a vision for the district, lead professional development, engage in hard conversations with staff members and suggest changes to the superintendent and board members. All staff were required to complete the equity module located on the Safe-schools website which consisted of a video and 25 multiple choice questions to complete. Pride County School District used Safe-schools to provide our staff with Bloodborne Pathogens and other required trainings at the start of the school year. Along with completing the training, Principals were asked to meet with their staff and discuss the video and report the outcomes back to the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council in order to prepare for larger scale training. The scholarly practitioner contacted and hired a consulting firm out of Seattle, Washington to provide equity training. Once training was completed for the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council, training began at each individual school via Zoom on the topic of what equity is and how do we achieve it for our students.

The process for reviewing policies and procedures has begun. It was suggested that the Advisory Council include parents as part of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council to get an understanding of their thoughts. The scholarly practitioner requested that principals solicit the service of at least one parent from their school to serve on the Advisory Council. Meanwhile, the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council has begun reviewing the district discipline, dress code and

honors placement policies to see how they are written. Reviewing data to see which students are which students seem to be most affected by the current policies was a focus of the review.

Based on previous data, the scholarly practitioner created a new professional development calendar geared towards meeting the needs of school staff. Members of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council participated in a train the trainer model with a consulting company and have begin to offer mini training sessions on equity after school and on professional development days. The first trainings offered were Equity I and II. Once additional trainings and planning has been completed with the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council, more professional development will be offered.

In addition, the scholarly practitioner met with the AIG Coordinator and discussed the results of a three-year data review, which indicated that minority students were not being recommended for AIG placement. As a result of the discussion, changes were implemented to the AIG program to include a new set of Pathways that will allow more students from the underrepresented populations to qualify for placement. Students now have five pathways that will allow them to gain entry into the AIG program. Those pathways are as follows:

1. Pathway #1: Academically Gifted in Reading (AR)

   - Reading EOG score ≥ 90% OR

   - Reading EOG score ≥ 85% and Level 3 on a performance assessment

2. Pathway #2: Academically Gifted in Math (AM)

   - Math EOG score ≥ 90% OR

   - Math EOG score ≥ 85% and Level 3 on a performance assessment

3. Pathway #3: Academically Gifted (AG)

   - Reading and Math EOG score ≥ 90% OR

- Reading and Math EOG score $\geq$ 85% and Level 3 on both performance assessments.

4. Pathway #4: Intellectually Gifted (IG)

- CogAT score $\geq$ 90% (any battery - Verbal, Quantitative, or Nonverbal)

5. Pathway #5: Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG)

- CogAT score $\geq$ 90% AND Reading and/or Math EOG $\geq$ 90%

The implementation of new AIG Pathways will support increasing equity in the school district and offer underrepresented student the chance to qualify for AIG placement.

The scholarly practitioner shared a new classroom observation tool with the Race and Ethnic Advisory to discuss the possibility of using it at the inception of the new school year. The classroom observation tool focuses on areas such as differentiation, seating of students, student engagement, and other areas academic areas that address equity. All members had the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the tool and make suggestion on how to improve it before it is presented to the superintendent and board members for approval.

After providing equity training and engaging in Professional Learning Communities, there was an increase in minority student enrollment for the 2020-2021 school year, there was a small change in the enrollment data to reflect slight increases in the total number of minority students enrolled in advanced classes. Please see results in Table 11.

Action Research Cycle III

Within Cycle III, changes implemented in Cycle II will be monitored and analyzed for effectiveness. The scholarly practitioner will ensure that the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council engage in yearly reviews of district policies and procedures to make sure they align with student needs. Making sure district policies and procedures are constantly reviewed will offer suggestions on changes needed to ensure students are exposed to equitable learning environments that meet their

Table 11

2020-2021 Advanced Course Data

| Advanced Course | Grade Level | Number of Students | Demographic Breakdown | | |
			White	African American	Multi Racial
Chemistry Honors					
	10th Grade	19	14	4	1
	11th Grade	2	0	2	0
	12th Grade	2	0	2	0
Pre-Calculus					
	10th Grade	9	6	2	1
	11th Grade	13	9	4	0
	12th Grade	5	4	1	0
American History II Honors	11th Grade	2	1	1	0

individual needs. Data gained throughout the school year from classroom observations, surveys, and trainings will serve as the driving force for changes that may need to occur to policies and procedures.

The classroom observation tool, developed by the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council, will identify equity in classroom lesson planning. The scholarly practitioner, principals, and other school administrators will use the classroom observation tool to offer feedback to teachers on their strengths identified as well as items that may need more consideration and thought. Teachers will have the opportunity to use the feedback gained from the classroom observation tool reflect on their teaching practices and brainstorm changes needed to establish equitable practices in the classroom.

Furthermore, the use of new Pathways in the AIG program will be analyzed to determine how they affect identification and placement of underrepresented students into the program. The AIG Coordinator will be able to compare data from previous years to determine if the new pathways are successfully providing equity for students. Additionally, data gained from the use of new Pathways will support future changes needed to improve the program.

Continuous trainings on equity will help the scholarly practitioner to adequately provide professional development opportunities for all staff that will focus on creating equitable learning environments for all students. Trainings will also help school staff to understand what acceptance means and how to make sure all students are being offered academic opportunities that will meet their needs. As a result of the changes implemented in Cycle II, minority student enrollment in advanced classes is expected to increase.

Summary

As outlined in the beginning of Chapter 4, the purpose of this study was to explore why there is a lack of minority enrollment in advanced level classes. Research questions for this study

focused on examining current policies and procedures to see how they affect minority enrollment in advanced classes; how does disproportionality affect the placement of minority students in advanced classes; and how does culturally responsive pedagogy…. Once research begins, you never know what the outcome is going to be; instead, you hope that the research will open the door for an honest look into the nature of the problem of practice being studied. From the time I was in school until the time I began working as an educator in the public school system, I always wondered why minority students always seemed to lag behind in course work. In other words, I thought it was strange that Black students were not in honors classes. This phenomenon stirred my curiosity to the point that this study focused on increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes. Interestingly enough, the results of the research opened my eyes to truth and the notion that many people would rather continue living a lie or remain oblivious, than face the truth and decide how to change things in order to help students be successful in the academic environment.

After surveying, engaging in focus groups and hosting face to face interviews with school administrators, school counselors, teachers, district staff and students, the results revealed many areas that must be addressed in the future in order to provide all students with an equitable opportunity. Some of the concerns shared for why there is a lack of minority enrollment in advanced levels classes include the following:

- Little to no advocacy for student enrollment in advanced classes
- Lack of parental involvement and understanding of the importance of advanced classes
- Current policies in place limit opportunity for minority students

- Not looking at student ability for enrollment opportunities in advanced classes instead, the focus was on grades and teacher recommendation

- Lack of support or interest from school staff

- Lack of culturally responsive pedagogy

- Lack of understanding of what equity means

Students want to feel a sense of acceptance in schools and they want to know that school staff have their best interest at heart and are going to do as much as they can to make sure all students are provided an equitable opportunity. Research by Dervarics (2011) indicates that there is a lack of minority students present in advanced classes and there is a need to gain necessary information to support the lack of minority students enrolled in advanced classes.

One of the findings that stood out in this study was that some of the Caucasian staff participants were not willing to admit that they needed to differentiate their instructional practices regarding how they teach minority students. They did not even think it was necessary to advocate for minority students and were more comfortable expressing that they advocate for all students. Their response illustrated implicit bias at work without those individuals realizing what was taking place. Another concern that was captivating was the fact that the high school principal openly admitted that he does not have enough contact with students and when he does talk to them, he talks to all students, not just minority students. He also shared that if he has a rapport with students, he talks with them slightly more. It was disheartening to me that the high school principal did not appear to take more of an active role with his students and their academic needs. The principal should carry the vision for the school and set the tone; however, that requires maintaining an active role with student and staff. As educators, we have to be more

diligent in our actions for making sure all students benefit from an equitable learning environment that will meet their needs.

On the other hand, the transparency displayed by students in their responses was impressive. They were not concerned with making school staff look bad; instead, they wanted to see things change so other minority students would be given additional opportunities to be academically successful. As a result of this study, many student participants volunteered to be a member of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council so they could finally have a seat at the table with educators and be able to voice their opinions on what can be done to support minority students and ensure they are provided an equitable opportunity to participate in the same course and have the same opportunities as their Caucasian peers.

Sometimes we take for granted that things are working well within an organization because it looks good on the outside. This study has shown that you should not judge a situation until you know the circumstances surrounding it. It was easy to assume that minority students were all being treated in a fair and equitable manner, yet, when the research was conducted, a different picture was painted. As educators, we should remember that "education is a civil right through which each child can maximize his or her potential, thus representing the definition of equity" (NSBA, 2019). In order for equity to be practiced, individuals may consider identifying intellectual abilities in all students and attempting to provide them with an individual education that meets their needs regardless of race.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine possible reasons why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes in a North Carolina school district and determine what practices can be implemented to increase minority participation in advanced level classes. This chapter summarizes the study, presents the findings and specifies the implications and recommendations needed to engage in further research as a result of the study. Chapter 5 is divided into the following sections:

- Discussion of the findings

- Implications

- Recommendations for further research

- Reflections on the leadership development of the researcher

- Conclusions

Discussion of the Findings

The objectives of this study are two-fold: to establish an understanding of why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes and to offer suggestions of how to improve practices to increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes. Former President Barack Obama (2013) stated "we are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else" (p. 3). It is important to make sure all students are able to receive a quality education regardless of their background. As educators, we are faced daily with making suggestions and implementing strategies that will improve student academic success. In doing so, we have a responsibility to ensure that all students are provided an equitable education that meets their needs. "Public schools have a responsibility to provide equitable access and ensure that all students have the knowledge and

skills they need to succeed in rapidly changing global society regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or ethnic background" (CPE, 2016, p. 2).

For the purpose of this study, the scholarly practitioner used action research and gathered both quantitative and qualitative data in order to produce a mixed research study. A mixed method was used because it was important for the scholarly practitioner to gain a deeper understanding of the problem of practice by studying the perceptions of various groups about this problem. The initial indicators used in this study consisted of enrollment data that displayed student enrollment data for all advanced level classes, end of course test data, end of grade test data, classroom grades and CogAT testing. CogAT testing is used to identify potential students who may qualify for the academically gifted program. Data was analyzed at the district and school level thus prompting a discussion about the lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. After reviewing the data sources, the scholarly practitioner conducted surveys, focus groups and interviews with school administrators, teachers, school counselors, and students in order to gain an understanding of why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes.

Critical Race Theory was the conceptual framework examined in this study to provide a platform of understanding of why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was a movement, which began with those who studied the relationship between race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The scholarly practitioner used Critical Race Theory to show the connection between race and the educational system and how important it is to utilize equity to meet the needs of all students. "Educational equity provides all students with the education they need to achieve certain outcomes in life" (Levitian, 2016).

The primary study questions of this study were:

1. How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in gifted classes?

2. How does the school district address disproportionality in advanced level classes?

3. How does professional development around equity affect the placement of students in advanced classes and advanced programs?

The scholarly practitioner reviewed various pieces of data in order to gain an understanding of the enrollment process and how it affected minority students. Data was examined for the 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 school year to compare enrollment numbers for minority students in advanced level classes. The data supported the trend of minority students being continuously absent from advanced classes, which was happening on a continuous basis from one year to the next year; therefore, posing a concern for the scholarly practitioner. The scholarly practitioner wanted to know why minority students were continuously being omitted from advanced programs and classes. Also, the scholarly practitioner was concerned as to why the problem was continuing and it seemed as if no one was addressing the concern. A further look into the data demonstrated that there did not seem to be an equitable distribution and offering of advanced level classes made available to minority students. When working with students, educators should be cognizant of practicing equity at all times. However, equity is not something that happens overnight, especially if individuals do not know or do not care what equity is. Nonetheless, we have an obligation to ensure that all students have equity built into their curriculum to give them a well-rounded education that will help to prepare them for their future. As educators, we have a responsibility to work diligently to close the achievement gap by setting high expectations for all students and engaging them in academic learning opportunities

of a rigorous nature that challenge and open new doors to learning for them (Quinton & National Journal, 2014).

As the scholarly practitioner embarked upon the research, all staff members were asked to complete a racial equity module through Safe Schools (Vendor used for back to school training). Completing the module allowed staff to engage in conversations about equity and what it means to them. The principal at each school led the discussion and reported the outcomes to the researcher. This action allowed staff the opportunity to build a sense of trust with each other and establish an atmosphere of openness and honesty. Staff admitted that prior to this research, the topic of equity had not come up. The module allowed staff to begin the conversation about race and how we need to be aware of our own biases.

Additionally, the scholarly practitioner organized a Race and Ethnic Advisory Council who would be responsible for addressing race and equity challenges within the school system. The idea originated with the scholarly practitioner after engaging in focus group interviews and individual interviews with staff and student participants. Student participants were very concerned about race and racism that was playing out in the media, especially with the killing of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, They could not seem to understand what was going on and why the school district had not taken a stand on racism. In addition to racism, many participants expressed the distress they felt associated with Covid-19. With everything going on, the scholarly practitioner thought it would make sense to create a team to work on issues and concerns in the school district that affect all students, especially minority students. Addressing matters of race was something necessary if the school district was going to move forward with the goal of providing all students an equitable education that meets their individual needs. According the board members and the Superintendent, Pride County Public School

District has never had a Race and Ethnic Advisory Council. The Race and Ethnic Advisory Council consisted of three principals, two school counselors, PBIS district coordinator, Testing and Accountability Director, Student Services Director, Technology Director, Exceptional Children's Director, AIG Lead teacher and the assistant superintendent, who is also the scholarly practitioner. In order to gain community, student, and board support, one board member agreed to serve on the council and five students also agreed to serve as part of the council. During the initial meeting, the council members completed an equity activity. This activity laid the foundation for members to share their concerns and offer suggestions for how we can move forward with making sure equity is a part of our educational structure in Pride County Schools. Based on the discussion, it was decided that the Race and Equity Advisory Council members needed to undergo equity training prior to training staff members. Once the council members participated in equity training and are ready to assist and serve as presenters, training was offered to all staff. Since equity is necessary for students to be successful, it is essential that all staff understand what it is and how it affects students and adults.

In addition, the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council felt that it was necessary to implement district-wide equity training at a slow pace because some staff members may be resistant to any form of change that will upset the traditional values and customs in place. Gaining buy-in and support from staff was important to the council and necessary for moving forward with suggestions that may arise as a result of the training. Therefore, Pride County Schools partnered with a consulting firm from Seattle, Washington to provide equity training. The training will give individuals the background knowledge and understanding of what equity is, what role it plays in education, and how we can ensure its presence in our curriculum and educational environment. Providing district-wide equity training will address study questions one, two and three and

ensure that policies and procedures are equitable for all students as well as make sure disporportionality and professional development around equity is being implemented in the school district. Implementing equity will help to make sure all students are provided an education that meets their needs and helps them to fulfill their goals. In order to increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes, we must have an understanding of what equity is and how to achieve it.

Research Questions

How do current policies and procedures limit the number of minority students in gifted classes? The findings from research question one indicate that some participants were not familiar with the policies and procedures. This response was alarming because in order to enforce a policy, you should have a clear understanding of what it is. However, other participants indicated that they believe current policies and procedures hinder minority students from being eligible for gifted classes. A review of Power-school data for Pride County High School gained during research demonstrated that White students comprise the majority of students enrolled in gifted classes (see Table 12).

Identifying students as academically gifted begins in elementary school with students being more likely to qualify for gifted services after testing and a review of qualifications is performed. A mass screening takes place at the third grade level according to board policy and identifications are made afterwards. Students are not normally tested or identified at the middle or high school level unless a student is a new enrollee. Data displays large numbers of identified AIG students due to previous students being classified as AIG (see Table 13).

Table 12

2019-2020 Advanced Course Data

| | | | Demographic Breakdown | | |
Advanced Course	Grade Level	Number of Students	White	African American	Pacific Islander
Chemistry Honors					
	10th Grade	17	12	12	0
	11th Grade	23	17	6	0
	12th Grade	2	2	0	0
Pre-Calculus					
	10th Grade	3	2	1	0
	11th Grade	24	18	6	0
	12th Grade	7	3	3	1
American History II Honors	11th Grade	12	9	3	0
	12th Grade	2	2	0	0

Table 13

AIG Identifications in Pride County Public Schools

Grade	Total Number	Race
K-5	14	11 Caucasian 1 African American 2 Multi-Race
6-8	42	33 Caucasian 4 African American 4 Multi-Race 1 Hispanic
9-12	46	37 Caucasian 8 African American 1 Hispanic

A further review of Power-school data for Pride County High School shows that minority students are not being identified as academically gifted nor are they being enrolled in gifted classes (see Table 14).

The findings from research question one are consistent with previous research indicating that minority students are not showing up in advanced level classes. Approximately 69% of all public schools offer Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs, yet the majority of the students who enroll in those classes are disproportionately affluent, White or Asian (Quinton & National Journal, 2014). Also, according to previous research statistics show that one in five White students took Algebra I while only one in 15 Black students did (Cook, 2015). Results are consistent with Critical Race Theory and show how race is a factor in minority student enrollment in advanced classes.

How Does the School District Address Disproportionality in Advanced Level Classes?
The findings from research question two showed that the school does not address disproportionality in advanced level classes. Research participants were comfortable admitting that students are enrolled in advanced level classes based on grades and teacher recommendation. There was not much attempt to solicit minority students for advanced level classes if their grades were not indicative that they could handle the workload. As a result, some participants shared that they did not advocate for minority students; instead, they treated all students the same. It seemed to be easy for some participants to believe they were doing the right thing by treating all students the same without realizing that Black students are not being treated the same or in an equitable manner. The findings for research question two are consistent with previous research indicating that disproportionality in advanced level classed is lacking. According to Ford and King (2014). It is easy to remain complacent and reject change rather than create new

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Table 14

Advanced Level Classes Data

Advanced Class	Number Enrolled	Race
Chemistry Honors	42	30 Caucasian 11 African American 1 Hispanic
Pre-Calculus	35	23 Caucasian 11 African American 1 Hispanic

opportunities and practice equality. At the school level, staff members should be the ones to break barriers and advocate for minority students to be included in advanced level classes and at the district level, leadership should take a stand and advocate for more of an equitable distribution of all students in advanced level classes. Furthermore, "it is unprofessional and unethical to promote and permit the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities to students based on race, which frequently occurs with Black students" (Ford & King, 2014, p. 300). This result is consistent with Critical Race Theory and shows how race is a factor in minority students enrolling in advanced classes.

How Does the Professional Development Around Equity Affect the Placement of Students for Advanced Classes? The findings from research question three indicate that equity training is necessary if staff members are going to change their behaviors and beliefs for the purpose of educating all students in an equitable manner. In order to teach minority students, you must first understand them. It is important that educators understand their students and their backgrounds. Sometimes students do not seem to care about their education until they know someone else cares. Research participants agreed that providing professional development that centered on culturally equity was a start to breaking barriers. Research participants admitted that they could not remember having any form of equity training since they have been employees of Pride County School District. Understanding equity will help educators to create environments of respect and acceptance for all students. The findings for research question three are consistent with previous research. Students want to feel accepted, valued and respected in the school environment and when that aspect is lacking, students tend to withdraw and develop a negative attitude towards school (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Gaining additional teaching and training relevant to equity will support the quest for everyone to be better prepared to ensure equitable

learning opportunities for all students. Pride County Schools has begun the process of providing equity training for all school district employees. Members of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council received the training first to ensure they would be able to provide additional training and support in the future. To further offer training, the scholarly practitioner created a professional development calendar that will allow staff to take advantage of equity training during the school year that will be lead by members of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council. Also, when you have the heart of an educator, you will be willing to do whatever it takes to reach all students regardless of their race or gender. This result is consistent with Critical Race Theory and shows that the facet of colorblindness will not change until mindsets change and mindsets will not change until individuals open up themselves to training that will support working and advocating for all students.

Interpretation of the Findings

The scholarly practitioner reflected on the Chapter 2 Literature Review to determine what factors played a role in increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes and how to reach the desired goal of making sure more minority students are enrolled in advanced level classes. "The landmark court case Brown v. the Board of Education sounded off the need for an education system that would allow all students equal access and opportunity to engage in challenging academic programs and experiences" (Lawson-McKinnie, 2016). Not only should school staff be responsible for creating equal access and opportunity, we should also take a look at the environmental situations that may create barriers to opportunity such as diversity, school connectedness, tracking, academic advising, parental involvement, and socioeconomic status.

Diversity

The research demonstrated that there is a not much regard for diversity within the educational culture. Student enrollment indicated that there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. Data also indicated that there are only two Black principals in the entire school district and there are less than 20 teachers of color in a teaching staff of 175 and less than 10 teacher assistants of color in a teaching staff of 175. The majority of custodial staff, cafeteria staff and bus drivers were Black. Central office staff was comprised of seven White directors and four Black directors. The scholarly practitioner utilized six Black staff members, ten White staff members, and seven Black students. Creating a diverse learning environment will send a message to all students that the school system is student centered and has their best interest at heart.

Schools are representative of various diverse groups of students that make up the entire system. Since diversity is present in schools, educators have the task of making sure all students are functioning in classroom settings that meet their needs. However, many times there are inequities present that hinder student access. Research conducted by Ford (2015) noted that public schools embody a setting that does not easily embrace the idea of diversity when it comes to advanced classes. Participant F shared that she believes the discouragement for Black students to be in honors classes starts early. Establishing an environment of acceptance and appreciation for all cultures is necessary to make sure diversity is embraced. In Pride County Public Schools, research matches the idea that diversity is needed in school systems, yet, it seems to be missing.

Often educators say that it is important to establish an environment that is conducive to learning for all students, but are we really engaging in that practice? The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) found that although the Black population of students was 13.6% of the total U.S.

population, Black students comprised only 9% of all students who took at least one AP exam. Schools represent a mixture of students; therefore, advanced level classes and those taking AP exams should also be inclusive of a variety of students. Evans (2007) noted in her research that the beliefs, actions and attitudes of school leaders can cause a negative or positive experience for Black students. Brown v. Topeka Board of Education was the epitome of diversity and equality in America. This case reminded America that separate was not equal and all children were entitled to an education regardless of the color of their skin (CPE, 2016). Brown v. Topeka Board of Education also reminds us that diversity consists of all children regardless of their race as well as level of intelligence. Diversity celebrates White students, Black and brown students, male and female students, honors and average students, exceptional and academically gifted students; however, they are all capable of learning and we cannot allow our implicit biases to deter us from providing them with an equitable education that meets their needs. Research conducted by Ohio State University (Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015) noted that when trying to understand implicit bias, it is important to understand the following traits associated with it;

- Implicit biases are pervasive end everyone harbors them.

- Implicit biases may not align with an individual's beliefs.

- People have implicit biases that favor their preferred groups.

Nevertheless, it is important to move past implicit biases and focus on what is necessary to accommodate students and provide them with an equitable education that will close the academic gaps that may be present. No Child Left Behind demonstrated the disparities present in the educational system and called for a revamping of the trends and procedures that were in place.

Research from the Applied Research Center (Applied Research Center, Race and Public Policy Program, 2003) noted that No Child Left Behind was designed with the following in mind:

- All children can learn.

- There is an achievement gap between children of color and White children that is not acceptable.

- The educational system must be held accountable for closing the achievement gaps and providing all children with an education to meet their needs.

Since schools are representative of different races and cultures, diversity is a facet that may help to improve relationships and opportunities. According to student Participant C, students appreciate being able to see staff members who look like them. School districts may need to put a strong focus on ensuring diversity is present within the school culture in order to support equity for all students and staff.

School Connectedness

Research yielded that there are times when students feel disconnected from the school environment. According to this research, students were not interested in enrolling in advanced level classes because they did not believe they were smart enough nor did they believe teachers wanted them in their classes. The majority of the 16 staff participants in the research agreed that school connectedness is vital to academic success for students. According to Participant H, "It is all about relationships between students and staff members." Participants also shared that relationships between students and teachers can deter students away from wanting to attend school; therefore, staff should create opportunities for students to like school and feel connected. School connectedness may serve as a catalyst to the support needed to improve student motivation. On the other hand, at least two of the seven student participants were not interested

in building relationships with some teachers because they did not believe some teachers were trustworthy. "I do not talk to many teachers because they gossip", according to Participant H. Also, Participant B shared that the some teachers are worried about the wrong thing, which turns students off. Students will appreciate academic environments that are exciting, innovative and accepting of their interests and desires.

Relationship building is an important part of feeling connected in the school environment and can, in some cases, be a deal breaker for some students. Just as adults want to feel connected and accepted in the workplace and at home, student want the same thing within the school environment. Research conducted by Monahan et al. (2010) noted that "students who feel connected to school like going to school, they like their teachers and fellow students and they are committed to learning, completing their assignments and doing well" (p. 3). Many conversations arise related to why students are not engaged in the classroom and why they are not motivated to even attend school on a regular basis, yet the issue of school connectedness never seems to come up as a possible reason. Research conducted by Salman (1988) indicated that if a student feels a lack of engagement in the school setting, they will separate and withdraw themselves from the learning environment both academically and emotionally. When students feel disconnected within the school environment, their grades tend to suffer and they lose interest in school, thus causing absenteeism to become an issue. Research from Blum (2005) indicated that youth who feel a sense of belonging in the school climate are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, fighting, and absenteeism and more likely to demonstrate motivation and engagement.

Participation in advanced classes is the necessary ingredient that some students need in order to feel connected to the school environment, especially those who have the capability to enroll in advanced classes, yet are often overlooked. Research conducted by Cherng and Halpin

(2016) indicated that students want to feel accepted, valued and respected in the school setting and when that aspect is missing, students have a tendency to withdraw and develop negative thinking and attitudes about school. The manner in which teachers treat students and school the degree of school connectedness are related and have an effect on student experiences. Actions tend to speak much louder than words for students and they tend to internalize everything, especially when they perceive negativity towards them. Research conducted by Baron et al. (1985) indicated that some teachers display higher expectations for White and Asian students than those shown for Black and Latino students. Research by Bland and Neve specifies that low teacher expectations explains why so many Black children are low achievers and contribute to low enrollment numbers in advanced level classes (2012). It is important to understand that nurturing environments are necessary for students to feel accepted and exemplify a willingness to put forth their best effort. As educator, we are responsible for establishing and creating environments that are conducive to learning for all students. Research conducted by Hemmeter et al. (2012) indicated that it is important to provide nurturing and caring school environments to all students in order to help them develop academically and socially.

Tracking

Research displayed that tracking is still occurring in education. There seems to be more focus on results from high stakes testing and teacher recommendation rather than academic ability and what is best for the student. This research revealed that EVAAS is an instrument used to gather data and make predictions for student enrollment based on end of year testing that may be considered to some as an example of tracking. Many of the staff participants were not aware of what EVAAS was and had never used it in the classroom. Other participants who were familiar with EVAAS has mixed emotions because some saw it as a helpful tool if it is used

properly and others saw it as another way to keep minority students out of advanced classes. Participant VIII stated that "EVAAS helps school administrators to see what students are projected to score on their end of grade test, identifies academic gaps present and alerts the teachers and administrators as to whether a students should enroll in advanced classes or not. On the other hand, Participant I shared that he misidentified three black males during the 2018-19 school year based on school data and not EVAAS data. The misidentification caused the young men to be enrolled in remedial math during their Freshmen year. When EVAAS data was reviewed in the Spring of 2019, it was discovered that each of they young men were predicted to score level five on end of course test and should have been enrolled in advanced math. There was no attempt to rectify the situation for the young men and they were enrolled in regular math for their Sophomore year. Participant I admitted that he needed to intervene and review data and transcripts more to help provide all students with equitable opportunities.

The term tracking, often referred to as ability grouping, seems to play a role in the identification of students who enroll in advanced level classes. Brunello and Checchi (2007) indicated that tracking is the process of grouping students together in different classes based on their ability levels. Tracking has often been seen as a way to differentiate instruction and make sure all students are provided the education skills they need to meet their needs. However, it has also been expressed that tracking is a negative method used by educators to deny certain groups of students the opportunity to excel in the school setting. Salman (1988) indicated that educational experts attack ability grouping as racist and elitist and another way to deny all students an equal education. Additional research by Kohli (2014b) revealed that tracking can be viewed as another form of segregation. Students are different and have varying needs; therefore, we must be careful not to place them all in the same box and assume that what works for one will

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work for all. Giersch (2018) indicated that student ability should be based on a variety of criteria rather than using high stakes testing or teacher recommendation. School tracking eliminates equity and offer students what we think they need rather than what they need based on their academic skills. In order to treat all students fairly, we have to access them and provide for them according to their academic needs.

Academic Advising

Research indicated that of the seven student participants, two received support from school counselors and five did not receive any form of guidance. All participants agreed that they advocate for themselves but were concerned about students who do not speak up for themselves. Participant A was vocal in saying that students really do not have a choice in what courses they take; instead, school counselors put you where they think you need to be without having any conversation with you. According to Participant F, black students are discouraged early from taking advanced classes because no one engages in conversation with them about advanced classes and they are left to decide for themselves. Many students will choose to take regular classes because they may believe that the work is easier and less time consuming but the final choice should come from students. Participants all believed that academic advising was necessary and important but all students needed to be offered equitable choices to meet their needs. "Teachers put you where they want you to be because they do not think you can handle it according to Participant H. Participant H also gave an scenario of when she was not able to take a certain advanced class because teachers did not believe she was smart enough. Making sure all students have an adequate education is vital to academic success. Providing training and other resources is a necessary component to ensuring that school staff are aware of what equity is and how to provide it to all students.

Participants were not deterred by not receiving assistance from the school counselor because they exhibited the drive and determination to succeed with or without support. Nonetheless, the school counselor serves as a gatekeeper for students and should display equitable practices among all students. All staff members have a role to play in the day-to-day operations within the school setting. Nonetheless, the school counselor plays a major role in the lives of students and helping them to grow, develop and embrace the future they have planned for themselves. Research conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (2021) shared that access to a school counselor can make a difference in student retention, grades and the likelihood of enrolling in post-secondary education. That does not mean that the school counselor is solely responsible for the success of a student; instead, it means they are responsible for helping to make decisions and providing resources necessary for students to be academically successful. The American School Counselor Association (2020) revealed that approximately 92,000 students felt that their school counselors were most responsible for influencing them to pursue a postsecondary education.

On the other hand, some participants believe that school counselors are not doing enough for students, especially those of color. Research by Abama (2018) indicates that Black students are underrepresented in AP classes and when they are enrolled, they score significantly lower than any other subgroup. Also, Carnevale and Fry (2000) indicated in a U.S. Department of Education study that Black, Latino, and low income students are three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree it they only attempt an AP class while in high school. The school counselor's role should not be diminished in any way and should be seen as a catalyst to making all students are enrolled in the proper classes and have the resources they need to be academically successful.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was an important piece for participants and each of them shared that their parents were quite involved in their education. All participants expressed that their parents were very supportive and eager to work with school staff to make sure the needs of their children were met. Each of the seven participants agreed that their parents were the main reasons they enrolled in advanced classes. Participant C was excited that her parents have always been her number one fan and they showed it by staying up late with her while she was completing assignments, calling teachers to get clarification on assignments and always giving an encouraging word. On the other side, staff participants had mixed views on parental involvement but they were not sure how to get parents involved. The research showed that most parents come out during the summer with their children to address course enrollment issues but there was not much participation afterwards. All 16 staff participants, all agreed that parental involvement was necessary to support academic achievement for students'; yet, it was an important missing ingredient. According to Participant XII, the support and encouragement a student receives from home is a starting point. It is important to reach out to parents and offer them support as well as their students. Furthermore, "some of the issue is low expectation on the part of the parent and teacher", according to Participant III. Research concluded that parents should be offered flexible opportunities to be involved in the educational process for their children.

As educators, it cannot be assumed that if parents are not showing up for meeting or returning phone calls, they are disengaged. Instead, they may be prioritizing work over parental involvement. Parental involvement plays a major role in the overall academic success of students; however, there are times when parents are not sure how to be involved in their child's education. Nevertheless, the commitment to ensure students are academically prepared and

successful should be a joint collaborative effort between parents and the school. Toldson (2008) indicates that educating students must become a joint effort in order for students to be successful. While having parental involvement in place sounds good, it is not that easy for some parents, thus causing them to rely more on the school system for guidance. Research by Benner et al. (2016) disclosed that many parents identified the following factors as challenges for them as it relates to parental involvement:

- Time

- Fear

- Not knowing how to be involved

- Lack of understanding for why they need to be involved

- Lack of understanding the importance of being involved

Some parents are more focused on trying to make ends meet for the family rather than being actively involved in their child's education. We must find a way to create systems and processes that will simplify how things are done in order to develop relationships with parents and create a culture of oneness, trust and understanding.

Socioeconomic Status

The research indicated that all participants came from different socioeconomic backgrounds; however, they all wanted to be academically successful. Of the seven student participants, four had parents who had graduated from four-year universities, one parent graduated from a two year college and two parents has no formal education after high school. Nevertheless, all student participants expressed that their parents were very supportive of their educational goals and supported them in any way necessary. Student participants did not talk a

great deal about their socioeconomic status, instead, they all commented that their parents always made a way for them to have what they needed to be successful in and out of the classroom.

Research by the American Psychological Association (2019) shows that socioeconomic status does not only refer to income, it also refers to educational attainment, financial security and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Therefore, we must note that students come to school and bring a variety of experiences with them. Everyone has a different story to tell and no two people are the same; therefore, we cannot assume that students are on a level playing field when they get to the school house. According to research by Doerschuk et al. (2016), low socioeconomic status is linked to academic achievement in the following manner:

- The success of low-income students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics discipline is much lower than that of students who do not come from underrepresented backgrounds.

Also, research by the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) displayed that in 2014, the dropout rate among students ages 16-24, was higher in low-income families compared to those in higher income families. Socioeconomic status can, at times, be a determining factor of how well they perform in school. According to Chapman et al. (2011), students living in poverty in 2009 were five times more likely to drop out of school and display poverty rates three times higher than those who were White. Changing the status quo in schools happens after educators are able to accept students for who they are and see the potential within each of them regardless of what socioeconomic status they come from.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was the Critical Race Theory because it provides a platform for understanding why minority students are often not enrolled in advanced

level classes. Race can sometimes play a vital role in educational decisions whether it is intentional or non-intentional. Rebecca Bodenheimer (2019) coined the term Critical Race Theory in the late 1980s and it emerged as a challenge to the idea that the United States had become a color-blind society where one's racial identity no longer has an effect on one's economic status. There were some individuals who asserted that White supremacy and racism were important factors in the American legal system and were in place to continue suppressing any forward movement that might take place for minorities. Derrick Bell argues the notion that Brown vs Topeka Board of Education was more concerned with the self-interest of Whites rather than a exemplifying a true desire to desegregate schools and improve educational opportunities for Black children. Critical Race Theory illustrates how issues with race make their way into the educational setting and hinder equitable practices from occurring.

For the purpose of this study, the scholarly practitioner examined race, colorblindness and storytelling as three main principals that comprise critical race theory. Race is defined as "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race" (Merriam Webster, 2021a). In today's society, racism seems to be a normal way of life for some individuals, and unfortunately, that attitude has made its way into the classroom. My research revealed that some participants, especially student participants, felt strongly that racism played a role in who enrolls in advanced level classes. Furthermore, student data collected demonstrated that there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. Educators must do a better job of practicing equity and making sure all students have access to all courses. Educators are charged with ensuring that all students are afforded an equitable education that meets their needs. Therefore, race is

Identified race as s social construct rather that a scientific one (Ladson-Billings, 2010). No one should be subjected to racism on any level because it signifies a derogatory and negative way of thinking that degrades others. Instead, everyone is entitled to be treated in a fair manner with dignity and respect.

Secondly, colorblind thinking asserts that equity can be obtained by applying the same rules to everyone across the board (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Many educators ascribe to the colorblind way of thinking because they believe that one size fits all in education. The study revealed that many educators believed that they treated all students the same regardless of their skin color. Additionally, educators in this research did not want to discuss how they differentiated for minority student; instead, they were much more comfortable sharing what they did for all of their students in the classroom. It appeared easier for educators to discuss equal opportunities for all students rather than equity for all. According to Vocabulary.com, "things that are the same size or have the same traits are said to be equal; when it comes to people, being equal means everyone has the same rights and opportunities", however, "equity is the quality of being fair, impartial or just" (Freedictionary.com, 2021). Yet, research has shown that everyone does not have the same rights or opportunities. Minority students are not enrolling in advanced level classes because they are not being offered the same opportunities as their White peers. "In order to provide all students with equitable learning experiences, we must intentionally critique and when necessary, reject using curricula in which our students identities are not represented" (Todd, 2021).

Storytelling is a method used in which minority student are able to tell their stories about their experiences with racial subjection and how they must contend with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Engaging in storytelling allows minority students to heal from hurtful

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incidences that have occurred in their lives. During this research, Participant A shared his story during the focus group of how he was jogging with another Black male and once they had finished jogging and were preparing to go home, the police drove up. The police asked who they were and what they were doing because a woman had made a complaint that two Black males were breaking into vehicles. According to Participant A, the woman's account was a complete fabrication that could have caused more of a stir if another police officer, who happened to know both young men, had not driven by and stopped. The incident was hurtful and degrading for Participant A. He used storytelling as a way of making others aware of what had happened to him. This is the same practice that many minority students engage in at school when unjust things happen to them. Minority students do not always feel that they can express themselves in the school environment and revert to storytelling as an outlet to share their true feelings. Richard Wright once stated "I'm saying that the situation of their lives evokes in them an almost unconscious tendency to hide their deepest reactions from those who they fear would penalize them if they suspected what they really felt" (Knaus, 2009). Storytelling can provide an understanding of different cultures and help educators to better understand minority students while minimizing racism.

Critical Race Theory is an essential component to this research because it challenges the belief that somehow racism is a normalcy that should be accepted and not changed (Deldago & Stefanic, 2001). Racism should never be accepted as a normal way of life because it is not normal; yet, research indicates that minority students are forced to deal with racist behaviors and actions daily that hinder their educational achievement. Critical Race Theory exposes the repercussions of racism and how it affects minority students in the educational environment. According to Ladson-Billings (2010), "Black students endure daily indignities that take its toll

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on them. The school environment should be one that prepares students for their future. In order to increase minority enrollment in advanced level classes, educators must be willing to look beyond race and accept students for who they are regardless of what they look like. Also, educators must be willing to let go of the old way of thinking that may have been impressed upon them and embrace a new mindset that will allow them to establish systems of equity for all students.

When engaging in research, it is necessary to determine if the research has been investigated before or if it is something innovative. In the case of this study of increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes, there is a great deal of research present; however, it does not appear that much has changed. Before this study, I knew that minority students were not showing up in advanced level classes and I was not exactly sure why not. However, this study has brought many things to the light for me. I realize that the biggest issue is that people seem to be content abiding by the same antiquated traditions and customs that appear to adhere to a slave mentality rather than a free person way of thinking. By 1860, slavery was a thriving business and slave owners made a great deal of money off the slave trade. Although business was great for slave owners, slaves were the ones who suffered the most because they were not allowed to read or write, their freedom to move around was restricted, and they were beaten when they were disobedient. According to Thirteen Media (2004), "since learning to read and write was usually prohibited by the master, some slaves had taken it upon themselves to learn from their parents, spouses, family members and fellow slaves as well as received instruction from their masters or hired tutors." Additionally, research conducted by History.com Editors stated that "under the Jim Crow system, the Black codes were put in place to seize Black children to work, decide when and how freed slaves could work, decide how much money they

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could make, take away voting rights, put Black citizens back into a system of indentured servitude and control where Blacks lived and how they traveled." This research has shown me that some people are comfortable with the status quo and no change. People would rather do what is wrong than loose a friend

Implications for Practice

Public schools are faced daily with making sure all students are provided a quality and equitable education that meets their needs and prepares them for their future. Increasing minority enrollment in advanced level classes is not a new topic of research; however, it appears that little new action has occurred to fix the problem. Things do not change overnight but change can happen if we work together to implement changes will make a difference. This study sought to examine why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes.

This study has yielded many implications for educators to consider in order to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes. First, the study will help for school counselors as they continue to help students. School counselors serve as gatekeepers for students, therefore, they should advocate for all students regardless of their academic background or what they look like. School counselors should focus on meeting with students and providing support for all students. School counselors should be involved in the scheduling and advising process for all students by engaging in individual conversations with students rather than simply allowing students to sign up for classes. School counselors should take on more of an active role in helping students to make academic decisions. Finally, school counselors should ensure that advanced level classes have equal representation from all students.

Secondly, the research will help to school administrators as they continue to support and help students. School administrators should make sure that all staff participate in equity training.

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School administrators should also ensure that participate in culturally responsive pedagogy and equity training that will support how to build culturally responsive environments that will meet the needs of all students. School administrators should examine current policies and procedures and revise when needed to meet the enrollment needs of students. This study will also help school administrators to utilize data sources for the purpose of serving students.

Thirdly, district level leadership will make decisions that are in the best interest of students. District leaders will examine criteria necessary for AIG placement and make changes where necessary in order to advocate for all students. District leadership will support the implementation of a new set of pathways for AIG identification that will allow more students to qualify for identification. The Race and Ethnic Advisory Council will also recommend that district leadership make changes to policies and procedures that may hinder student achievement. This study will help district leadership to provide professional development opportunities that focus on providing culturally responsive pedagogy training to staff as well as training centered on data.

Next, this study will help the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council as they prepare to become equity trainers who will be responsible for serving as trainers throughout the district on matters of equity. Research will prepare district staff for required equity training that will begin in August and continue through the entire school year. In addition to Race and Ethnic Advisory Council members facilitating equity training, the scholarly practitioner will recommend outside resources for training purposes. Members of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council will create an Equity Plan that will be used to guide the district in implementing equity in the academic environment.

Also, the study will help school administrators and school counselors as they make enrollment decisions for advanced level classes. It will be important to review all data sources for students in order to provide a clear picture of the student's ability and make informed decisions on enrollment into advanced level classes. Lastly, the research will provide a roadmap for the community to see and understand why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes as well as how to increase minority enrollment in advanced classes.

Limitations

This action research study was used to investigate why there is a lack of minority students enrolled in advanced level classes. While engaging in research, the researcher identified certain limitations that would affect the study. The first limitation identified by the scholarly practitioner was the fact that the study focused on students attending school in a rural North Carolina school district without any information regarding the existence of the same problem in urban and suburban school district. It is assumed that urban and surburban school districts experience the same concerns with how to increase minority enrollment in a advanced classes and programs; however, without engaging in the research, it is difficult to determine if the problem exists. Nonetheless, the scholarly practitioner thought it would be more beneficial to focus on school districts that were comparable to Pride County Public Schools rather than those who were much larger in size.

Another limitation for the scholarly practitioner was that research participants would not be completely honest in their answers due to the researcher serving as assistant superintendent for Pride County Public Schools. Sometimes individuals may feel that they cannot be completely honest in their answers for fear of retaliation if an answer is given that is not popular with the scholarly practitioner. The scholarly practitioner assured all participants that her position would

not be a threat in any way to them and she wanted honesty from them in order to gain valuable input that would help to make decisions for the students. Nevertheless, the scholarly practitioner assured all participants that their answers would be completely confidential and used for the purpose of improving academic opportunities for students.

Furthermore, the scholarly practitioner graduated from Pride County High School, which is considered a limitation. This could be a limitation because participants may assume that the scholarly practitioner will bring biases to the research based on her previous experience with the school system. The scholarly practitioner assured participants that she would remain neutral throughout the study. She informed participants that her role in the research is to gather the data, transcribe it and be able to make recommendations based on the research.

Recommendations for Further Research

When making recommendations for future research, it is important to understand that unexpected events happen that we have no control over and we have to decide how to proceed. COVID-19 was one of those unexpected occurrences that arose and caused everyone to have to readjust and revamp original plans that were in place. As educators, we should be mindful that change is necessary and has a way of a dictating how effective we are in working with the students. Sometimes we prepare for change and other times, it slips up on us without even allowing time to adjust. COVID-19 is a pandemic that occurred without any warning and caused us to change our normal daily routines in the classroom. As educators, we found ourselves faced with having to devise a plan that would adequately provide an education for students without any guidance. COVID-19 changed the course of history and life forever and normal, as we knew it, may never be the same again in this country. We found ourselves moving from the face to face

traditional manner of educating students to figuring out how to educate students in a remote fashion all in the course of 48 hours.

COVID-19 also shed light on the disparities present among various ethnic groups and caused everyone to see clearly what it means to live among the have and the have nots. Families are now faced with how to ensure their children obtain an education in a remote setting despite not having the technology devices necessary not to mention, some families lack Internet in their homes and the county lacks the appropriate infrastructure to get and maintain connectivity in certain communities. COVID-19 has definitely exposed an opportunity and access gap. Although this research is titled "increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes and programs in a rural North Carolina school district", the scholarly practitioner was concerned that COVID-19 would widen the academic gaps that already exist among underrepresented populations of students simply because many students in the district do not have access to a technology device at home or do not have Internet services within the home. Instead of increasing minority enrollment in advanced classes, the scholarly practitioner was concerned that students who may have qualified prior to COVID-19 as eligible to enroll in advanced classes may now be identified as regular students and will miss the opportunity to experience a well-rounded educational experience that will prepare them for the future.

COVID-19 caused the scholarly practitioner to think about where we go from here. There will be a strong possibility that the academic residue remaining after COVID-19 will open the door for more research to be done on how to retain minority honors students in advanced classes and programs and how to motivate the unmotivated. Motivation is a factor that has been identified throughout COVID-19 as a concern for teachers. Not only are some of the at-risk students displaying a lack of motivation, so are the students who generally like going to school.

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If this research is replicated in the future and the restrictions of COVID-19 are not in place, it would be a good idea to collect all data in a face-to-face setting. Face-to-face settings are more personal that Zoom and allows you to see facial expressions and attitudes up close. Plus, the face-to-face environment eliminates the possibility of technology not working. It will also be a good idea to make school visits to gain an up close and personal understanding of what other schools are doing to tackle the issue of increasing minority student in advanced level classes. Seeing what other school districts are doing will allow for conversation to occur and new ideas to emerge. In hindsight, beginning the data collection process sooner would have been beneficial because we do not know what will happen from day to day so it is best not to put off for tomorrow what you can do today. Nevertheless, the opportunity to have an alternate method to complete the data collection process was presented. When the pandemic is over, hopefully, these findings will produce suggestions that will help to support the establishment of an equitable education for all students regardless of their race, socio-economic status, or gender even in the midst of a pandemic.

Reflections on Leadership Development

When I began my journey at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, I was very unsure of myself and lacked a great deal of confidence. I never admitted that to anyone because I figured it was my hurdle to overcome. To be honest, I was completely surprised that I was admitted to the program; however, I was excited. I felt that I was too old for this new adventure and maybe I needed to give it up. After all, I had just watched my daughter graduate with her PhD from Old Dominion University and that was enough for me or so I thought. Nevertheless, I have grown from being unsure of myself and wanting to quit every week to being more confident and wanting to complete this process. I have learned a great deal

about myself throughout this process. I can compare myself to a baby who is dependent on his or her parents to do everything for them until they reach adulthood. Adulthood is when most people spread their wings and gain a sense of independency or at least we should. However, there are times when the adult has to embrace the nest of his or her parents because they failed to handle the challenges associated with adulthood. Once they make it to the second time around, the learned experiences cause them to operate in a more efficient manner and make wise decisions. I am that adult who needed a second chance to grow and mature in this process. I learned that if you do not do things right the first time, keep trying until you get it right and never allow doubt to take control and cause you to quit.

My leadership development and growth is evident in the manner I handle my work assignments, supervise staff, and communicate with others. This process has caused me to problem solve more than before and look for research based solutions rather than rely on what someone says or on what I think. I am more apt to ask for supporting documentation when someone is submitting a document to me or requesting to purchase something.

Leadership development did not just occur in the office setting for me, it also took place working with students. When I engaged in the data collection process, I was fortunate enough to have a group of intelligent young men and women who demonstrated a tremendous amount of drive and determination to be successful. Five of the student participants volunteered to serve as student members of the Race and Ethnic Advisory Council in order to provide student perspectives on the minority experience in the high school setting. As a result of their participation, we organized a student panel discussion on race and equity matters in the high school setting. We collaborated with the same consultant we were using to provide equity training and she was responsible for serving as the facilitator for the student panel. There were a

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total of three meetings with the students prior to the student panel in order to develop questions for discussion, and establish protocols and procedures we would use. Afterwards, an invitation was sent to school staff, parents, board members, community members, students, and the superintendent. It is important to note that I assured the student panel participants that no one would know at that time that they were a part of the research taking place and I would maintain confidentiality at all times. Nonetheless, on the evening of the student panel, there were at least 50 individuals who attended and some of the questions asked include the following:

1. What is working or not working for you as a student right now? Students chose to elaborate on concerns such as White washed curriculum, lack of sensitivity, lack of communication, dealing with COVID and racism, etc.

2. Who has access to opportunities in your school? Students spoke openly about who has access to honors classes, who gets asked to participate in sports and student leadership, role of the counselor, etc.

3. Given the current environment we're living in, which has been described as a "dual pandemic", what role does racism play in the Black student pandemic? Students elaborated on what they perceive a dual pandemic to be, social emotional needs of students, protests occurring in America and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.

4. What is it like to be a Black male student at this time in our country's history? Student shared their concerns about negative media messaging, militarized training of police, what the term Karen means, etc.

5. What would racial equity look like in Pride County Schools and what needs to happen for this to become the new normal? Student openly suggested that changes should be

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made to the curriculum, dress code, discipline, culturally responsive training and teaching, etc.

As I watched and listened to the student actively engage in the panel discussion, I could hear and feel their passion for the topics and how they want to see things change to help others. I was very proud of the students for their willingness to tackle the topic of race because many would rather continue to keep it hidden as if it does not exist. They shed light on many different areas and gave everyone something to think about. Additionally, they became the first group of students to ever serve on a student panel in the school district. They displayed confidence and determination to share their experiences and allow their voices to be heard. In addition, they caused me to understand that I have work to do in order to make sure all students are afforded an equitable education that meets their needs. I realize that this road will not be easy because systematic structures and traditions that have been in place for years will have to be revisited, discussed and most likely changed but I am up for the challenge because students matter. This experience was very eye opening and confirming for me. However, a positive advantage of the student panel was that teachers and staff who attended were forced to listen to the hearts of the students while accepting their part and coming to grips with the harsh realities that were expressed by students. I cannot change the world but I can work hard to ensure that our students are equipped with what they need to leave Pride County High School and build their futures.

Overall, this has been a life changing experience and one that has caused me to stretch myself and learn what perseverance truly means. I remember someone saying at the start of this program three years ago that the process is not for the faint at heart. I did not quite understand what they meant at that time but here I am three years later and I completely understand.

Summary

As educators, it is critical that we ensure that all students are provided an equitable education and equipped with the skills they need to be academically successful. It is also important to remember the role history and race have played in the education of minority students in order to understand the need for change. Change is not something that happens overnight; instead, it takes time. However, working together in unison as educators will provide all students with a variety of resources to who will support and advocate for them. We cannot erase history but we don't have to repeat it. Instead, we can work night and day to make sure our minority students are being considered and enrolling in advanced level classes that will offer them exposure and the opportunity to gain an equitable education on a level playing field that will prepare them to lead and succeed in the 21st century.

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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:	Tammy Boone
CC:	Karen Jones
Date:	6/15/2020
Re:	UMCIRB 20-001233
	Increasing Minority Enrollment in Advanced Classes

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 6/15/2020 to 12/30/2020. 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 only initiated with 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. Applying for continuing review and receive approval of continuation of the study prior to the study's current expiration date. Application for continuing review should be submitted no less than 30 days prior to the expiration date. Lapses in approval (i.e. study expiration) should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled participants and liability to the University; and

5. Submission of a final report when the study meets the UMCIRB criteria for closure. Study approval should not be allowed to expire simply because the study is completed, rather the UMCIRB should be formally notified of study completion via the final report process.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Assent Form	Consent Forms
Chapters 1-3	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Consent Form (employees).doc	Consent Forms
Focus Group Questions - Students/Administrators/Staff	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Protocol - Students/Staff	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Parental Consent	Consent Forms
Survey Questions	Surveys and Questionnaires

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.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (STUDENTS)

1. What is an Advanced level class and which ones are available at your school?

2. Which Advanced level classes have you taken or considered taking? Why?

3. What factors contributed to your decision to enroll or not enroll in an Advanced level class?

4. What role did your School Counselor play in your decision to take or not take an Advanced level class?

5. How are Advanced level classes beneficial to academic learning?

6. What are your thoughts about student teacher relationships?

7. Have you discussed student experiences with your friends who are currently enrolled in Advanced level classes?

8. What are your student perspectives on the academic opportunities you have been offered?

9. What outside factors may influence your decision to enroll in an Advanced level class?

10. What support will your family provide to you if you enroll in an Advanced level class?

APPENDIX C: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS)

1. How do Advanced level classes provide the academic background necessary for students to attend college?

2. What role does behavior play in the selection of academic classes for minority students?

3. What role does academic performance play in the selection of academic classes for minority students?

4. What type of progress monitoring is in place to monitor academic achievement for students?

5. What role do you play in the recruitment of minority students?

6. What role do you play in the retention of minority students?

7. How do you inform parents of the academic track their child should pursue?

8. How is EVAAS used as a performance indicator for placement into Advanced classes?

9. How do you ensure equal academic opportunities for all students?

10. How can the District's policies and procedures be more effective

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (STUDENTS)

1. Did you know about advanced classes before you came to the high school?

2. What advanced classes, if any, have you been enrolled in?

3. Did someone approach you about taking advanced classes? If so, who?

4. Would you have enrolled if someone hadn't approached you? Why? Why not?

5. Define mindset and what it means to yon.

6. Tell me about your experience in advanced classes….

7. Do you think the advanced classes you are enrolled in are balanced? (mostly White, mostly Black, other?)

8. Does a balanced class matter to you?

9. Were you prepared for the curriculum?

10. Do you think race is an issue in your classes? Is it an issue in your school?

11. Who do you talk to when you are having a difficult day?

12. If you could give any advice to your school administrators to make things better for all students, what would it be?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (ADMINISTRATOR, TEACHERS,

SCHOOL COUNSELORS)

1. How familiar are you with advanced classes?

2. Has you child expressed an interest in enrolling in advanced classes?

3. Do you attend parent nights and ask questions about course availability?

4. What are your academic goals for your child?

5. Do you think the school is meeting the academic needs of your child? Is so, how?

6. Do you see any barriers present to student learning?

7. How often do you talk with the school counselor regarding your child's academic needs?

8. What improvements, if any, do you think should be made to improve the educational
    experience for all students?

APPENDIX F: SURVEY QUESTIONS (STUDENTS)

1) My school offers a curriculum that challenges students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   StronglyAgree

2) My teachers and administrators value what I have to say.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

3) At my school, everyone respects all races and cultures.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

4) Students care about learning and getting a good education.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

5) Creativity is valued in my school.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

6) Students care about learning and getting a good education.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

7) Students are being prepared for after high school.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

8) My teachers have display high expectations for all students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

9) My teachers make me feel that I am a valuable part of their class.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

10) Advanced classes are offered to all students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

11) My teachers understand and respect me as a student.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

12) Teachers encourage me to do my very best.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

13) My classes are interesting and challenging.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

14) I participate in class on a regular basis.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

15) My teachers and counselors talk with me about maintaining good academic performance.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

16) My counselor takes an interest in my career plans and helps me to attain them.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

17) Opportunities are present for students to enroll in classes that are challenging.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

18) I have parental support at home.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

APPENDIX G. SURVEY QUESTIONS (TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, SCHOOL COUNSELORS)

1) I display high expectations for all students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

2) I try to do what's best for all students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

3) I view students as individuals and not stereotype them as part of some group.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

4) I believe in all students ability to learn.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

5) I work well with students from different backgrounds.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

6) Students in my school care about learning and getting a good education.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

7) Students are offered academic offerings that meet their academic needs.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

8) All students are offered a challenging and rigorous curriculum.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

9) I believe that student-teacher relationships are important and affect their overall school success.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

10) I maintain an equitable learning environment that meets the needs of all students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

11) I serve as an advocate for underrepresented students.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

12) I inform students and parents of academic opportunities that will help students to grow.

Strongly Agree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree