BLACK STUDENT ACCESS TO ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSEWORK IN A
SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of high school students across America are taking AP courses; however the amount of Black high school students taking AP courses is very low. This qualitative case study explored the approach taken at one predominately White suburban high school that had undergone recent demographic change to encourage AP participation for Black students. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Cultural and Social Capital Frameworks, I examined the schooling environment that Black students encountered. Secondly, it was important to scrutinize the factors within the school community that supported or inhibited Black student access to AP coursework. Finally, I studied what factors in the Black community encouraged the taking of AP courses.

Valdosa is a suburb of Chicago and Valdosa East High School (VEHS) was the focus of the case study. VEHS was the original high school in the district and currently VEHS has an enrollment of 2057 with a Black student percentage of 8%, a dramatic increase as the Black population measured at 1.3% in 1998. Interviews of school administrators, counselors, an AP teacher, Black students and their parents were part of the study as well as observations of Black students' registering for courses. The findings from the study suggested that a color-blind mind-set existed within VEHS as all students were treated in a similar manner without regard for cultural differences. Staff in VEHS, particularly two counselors, built relationships with Black students and encouraged them to take rigorous courses. Also peer to peer interaction at VEHS provided the social capital to Black students to help them acquire the needed cultural capital to navigate the educational system and enroll in AP courses. Ultimately the Black students who took AP courses learned how to navigate VEHS and owned their educational opportunities in order to be prepared to go to college.

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Problem Statement

High school students are taking advanced placement (AP) courses across the country in an effort to prepare themselves for college and obtain college credit if they score well enough on the AP tests. In recent years, magazines like *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Washington Post* newspaper have created rankings of top high schools across the United States. *U.S. News and World Repor*t (2012) based on their ranking upon AP enrollment within the schools. *Newsweek* Magazine (2012) chooses the best high schools in America by assessing how these schools prepare their students for college. A portion of the ranking is based on AP tests taken and the number of AP courses offered. This increased national attention to student enrollment in AP courses by these publications has created an environment where the effectiveness of high schools is based impart on these ratings. These ratings are also contingent on the number of minority students that participate in AP coursework. This has led to school personnel in high schools pushing students to take AP courses with an emphasis on minority students' access to AP courses.

Last year, more than one million U.S. public high school graduates reported taking at least one AP exam. This was a dramatic increase of 489,267 graduates reporting taking an AP exam from a decade prior. Since some students take more than one AP exam in their high school career, progress has also been made in the area of total AP exams taken. The class of 2013 took 3,153,014 tests, an increase of 1,824,503 tests taken since 2003 (College Board, 2014). However, a closer look at the data (particularly in Illinois) indicates that there is still work to be done when it comes to the traditionally underrepresented minority student as there is a problem of uneven accessibility and performance among minority students.

Unfortunately, the amount of Black students taking AP courses is very low. Last year in Illinois, 54% of all White students from the graduating class of 2013 took at least one AP exam, and of these students 63% scored a 3 or more on the AP exam. In the same year, only 16.4% of Black students took an AP class, a .7% decrease from 2012, with 11.1% taking at least one AP exam. Only 4.6% of these Black students earned a score of 3 or more on the exam (College Board, 2014). The participation and success rate of Black students taking AP courses is lower than Hispanic students. In Illinois, 19.8% of Hispanic students took an AP course in 2013 compared to 18.3% the year before. Of these students, 17.7 % took an exam and 16% received a score of at least 3 (College Board, 2014). There is not just a discrepancy in the percentage of students taking the AP class, but also in overall performance. Across the nation, the mean score on the AP tests was 3.01 for White students and 1.99 for Black students (College Board, 2014).

Currently, there is a lack of quality research examining why Black students are not taking AP coursework in suburban high school districts that are experiencing demographic changes. Participation in AP courses is regarded as a predictor of future post-secondary success, which will be discussed later. Regardless of the reasons why Black families are moving to the suburbs, educational institutions are doing a disservice to Black students if they are not giving them access to the most rigorous curriculum. This case study will shed light on the approach taken at one suburban high school that has undergone demographic change, to encourage AP participation for all students, particularly Black students.

Significance

From 1990 through 2010, major population and demographic shifts have occurred in suburban communities across the United States. As a result, suburbs are increasingly considered melting pots. More specifically, more than half of the Black population in larger metros areas like Chicago; now live in the suburbs (Frey, 2011). The Black population comprised of 51% of

the total population in these suburban areas in 2010 up from 37% in 1990 (Frey, 2011). Since

the traditional fabric of the suburbs has changed, the populations that suburban high schools are

serving have become more diverse. Suburban school districts in 2006-2007 educated students

that were 41% non-white compared to 28% non-white in 1993-94. More specifically, the Black

student population enrolled in suburban schools grew to 15% from 12% over the same time

frame (Fry, 2009). These demographic shifts have occurred simultaneously with the emphasis

on increasing academic rigor for all students in public high schools across the country.

High schools across the country are attempting to be recognized as one of the top high

schools in America on lists published by magazines such as *U.S. News and World Report*,

Newsweek, and the *Wall Street Journal* newspaper. When schools receive these recognitions it

provides a sense of pride in the school and is celebrated by the communities in which they serve.

It would behoove the leaders in these high schools to foster connections with the minority

students within their educational institutions to encourage these students to challenge themselves

academically. However, minority students come from various unique cultures and reaching out

to all students in a universal manner may not be effective. If school personnel discuss course

selection to all students in the same manner regardless of their race and cultural background,

minority students may not be as receptive as White students. A more culturally responsive

approach in terms of how school personnel connect to Black students and encourage them to take

AP coursework may be necessary.

Why Examine the Issue?

USA Today had a feature article on Black families moving to the suburbs from urban

areas. Kendall Taylor grew up in the south side of Chicago and decided to move 35 miles away

to Plainfield. "I didn't want my children to grow up in the same environment I did," says Taylor,

38, who bought a house in Plainfield with his wife Karen, 38, in 2007 (Keen, 2011). They have

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one son, Jeremiah, who is 15. Plainfield is a fast growing suburb of about 40,000 that is experiencing a trend seen throughout the country in which hundreds of thousands of Blacks have moved away from cities, including Chicago, Oakland, Washington, New Orleans and Detroit. From 2000 to 2010 the Black population in Plainfield grew by 2,000 percent (Keen, 2011).

The 2010 U.S. Census report indicated that Chicago-Joliet-Naperville was the fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States. Fifty-six percent of the total population in this region was Black (U.S. Census, 2011). Across the United States, 96 of the largest 100 metropolitan areas showed gains in their suburban Black populations from 2000-2010. Of these 96 metropolitan areas, more than 75% had larger increases than in the 1990's (Frey, 2014). As Black households move out to the suburbs for a better life, it is important that the high schools within these communities provide the same opportunities as their White counterparts that have lived in the community for years. School leaders need to understand the background and experiences that Black students bring with them and re-examine school policies and outreach efforts to encourage all of their students to challenge themselves academically.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore whether Black students are accessing rigorous curriculum by taking AP courses in a predominately White suburban high school that has undergone recent demographic changes. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Cultural and Social Capital Frameworks, I examined the schooling environment that Black students encounter. Secondly, it is important to scrutinize the factors within the school community that support or inhibit Black student access to AP coursework. Finally, I studied what factors in the Black community encourage the taking of AP courses. The internal factors that exist within the Black community are critical since Black communities possess valuable cultural capital that needs to be highlighted in the school community (Yosso, 2005).

Previous studies indicate nationwide that Black students are not accessing rigorous curriculum at the same rate as White and Hispanic students, however more research is needed to understand this issue within a suburban school context. By engaging in qualitative research at a suburban high school that has undergone recent demographic change, the collective approach taken at that school should be critically examined to see whether the school structures are responsive enough to support Black student access to AP courses.

This study answered three fundamental questions:

1. How do the institutional structures within the high school impact Black students access to rigorous curriculum?

2. How does the staff within the high school build relationships with Black students to access rigorous curriculum?

3. How do Black students rely on their own cultural and social capital to navigate high school to access rigorous curriculum?

Theoretical Frameworks: Social and Cultural Capital and Critical Race Theory

Three theoretical frameworks were utilized in this dissertation: Critical Race Theory, Social Capital, and Cultural Capital. According to Solorzano (1997), Critical Race Theory or CRT is a framework that "seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color" (p. 6). Cultural capital refers to the habits and dispositions that facilitate cultural heritage of a society (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Coleman (1988) defined the framework of Social Capital as a social network that improved the outcomes in a system and leads to improved behaviors.

The marriage between CRT, Cultural and Social Capital theory makes sense because these theories can provide insight into the inner workings of an educational institution. The

cultural capital within a high school is established over time. It has especially metastasized in the culture of the dominant White community and this culture has racial overtones that Black students are sensitive to. At the same time, Black students have their own cultural capital that is equally valuable, but may be unrecognized within the educational system. The lens of CRT assists in the identification of racism that permeates the school and brings these inequalities to light in order to make the school a better place for all students. The establishment of social networks within the school setting can assist Black students in accessing the needed cultural capital to be successful in school.

In this study of a suburban high school that has undergone recent demographic change, more Black students are moving into an educational setting that has historically educated students of White middle class families. The school may or may not have the educational structures in place that are culturally responsive to Black students or the social networks of staff members who make connections and build relationships with Black students to encourage them to take AP coursework. Before any substantive change can occur in the educational institution it is essential to uncover the existence of racism in its various forms as a potential factor preventing Black students from taking rigorous classes.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation was divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 was an introduction beginning with the problem statement highlighting the disparity between White and Black students taking AP courses. The remainder of the introduction consists of: the significance of the study, why examine the issue, the purpose statement, and theoretical frameworks. Chapter 2 presented a comprehensive review of the literature. The third chapter described the research methods including: research questions, the explanation of the methodology, site selection, and participant selection. The data collection portion of Chapter 3 included interviews, observations, and review

of school documents which created the triangulation of data. Chapter 4 presented the results of the qualitative case study as themes were coded and analyzed. In Chapter 5, the findings and results were highlighted that can be generalized by the reader. Ultimately, I hope that this case study provides recommendations for schools and their leadership teams looking to incorporate diversity within their school system in an equitable manner.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The fundamental aim of this chapter was to review and synthesize research related to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Cultural and Social Capital Theories and how these frameworks inform our understanding of how Black students access rigorous curriculum. It should be noted that throughout this review of literature the term rigorous curriculum will be used synonymously with AP coursework. School institutions and staff can support or inhibit the acquisition of social and cultural capital by Black students. It is also relevant to examine the role of race in the educational experiences of the Black student. The manner in which the school community approaches racial issues can potentially have a positive or negative influence on Black student participation in AP programming. Individual school personnel also have a pivotal role in the academic development and the approach that Black students may take towards their own education. For the purposes of my dissertation, I outlined the research that focused on Black student access to AP courses.

The general topics of the literature review were divided into two sections. The first section was a look at key tenets of Critical Race Theory. Based on the research, three key tenets of CRT were particularly relevant for this study: the permanent nature of racism, colorblindness, and storytelling. The second portion of the literature review was an analysis of Cultural and Social Capital Theory. Practices within the school setting and staff interactions with students can support or inhibit student acquisition of needed cultural and social capital. However, before this examination it is important to highlight why providing equal access to AP coursework for Black students was a significant issue.

Why AP?

As described earlier in Chapter 1, the data was clear that Black students are not taking AP courses at the same rate of White and even Hispanic students. Nearly 80% of African-American students and 70% of Hispanic students did not take an AP course because they lacked the opportunity, encouragement, or motivation to participate (Rankin, 2012). This discrepancy was critical since students who succeed on an AP exam during high school are more likely than their peers to achieve academic success in college. These students were also more likely to earn a college degree and incur lower college costs by finishing in four years or less. If a high school student passed just one AP course, the chances of graduating from college was more than three times higher than for students with comparable SAT scores who did not take AP coursework (Rankin, 2012). Adelman (2006) stated that the single most important predictor of college success was completion of a rigorous high school education, which would include AP courses. He discovered this in his study of nationally represented students as they went from high school through college. AP was also increasingly emphasized as a factor in admissions, particularly at selective colleges and universities (Geiser & Santelices, 2004).

In the late 1990s, the U.S. Department of Education (Adelman, 1999) and The College Board (Freedman & Krugman, 2001) sought to close the achievement gap by focusing on equitable access to AP courses for all students. Adelman (2006) sought to "ascertain what contributes most to the acquisition of a four year college degree" (p. 11). He also noted, "AP course taking is more strongly correlated with bachelor's degree completion than it is with college access" (p. 7). In keeping with this, Freedman and Krugman (2001) stated, "We must focus on our commitment to equity, especially in access to AP and in support for AP preparation in schools. All students should have access to AP courses and have the chance to acquire the skills needed to succeed in them" (p. 4).

Unfortunately, inequities are a reality throughout the entire educational system not simply regarding access to AP courses. 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 (2013) reported that Black students comprised only 9% of the total population of all students that took at least one AP exam. It was apparent that the despite the efforts of the College Board to encourage minority students to participate in taking AP courses, work still needs to be done for this to translate into improved participation and results.

So how can we explain the lack of Black student participation in AP coursework when the benefits of taking such courses seem apparent? More specifically, as more Black students attend suburban high schools are they enrolling in AP courses? These suburban high schools should provide more rigorous curricular opportunities for Black students. If Black students within these high schools were not accessing AP coursework, then staff within these organizations need to look at how they are operating and reaching out to Black students and their families. I explored this inequity through the CRT and Social and Cultural Capital lens in this dissertation to help further explain why this participation gap was occurring.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory or CRT was a movement which began with those who studied the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It began in the judicial arena to address the effects of race and racism in the legal system (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lopez, 2003; Solorzano, 1997; Tate, 1997) with such scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). William Tate and Gloria Ladson-Billings raised the issue of critical race theory in 1995 relative to education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005). These authors asserted that race was a critical factor in society and more specifically education. They believed that CRT could

be used to explore the role of race and racism in education. A particular focus was on the

crossroads of race and property rights as it helped provide clarity to the inequities in the school

system. Property rights in the sense of a right of each individual not something tangible (Dixson

& Rousseau, 2005). Several basic tenets of CRT were identified throughout the educational

literature. This study focused on three tenets: *racism, colorblindness*, and *storytelling*. Delgado

and Stefancic (2001) identified two other tenets of CRT not directly examined in this study, but

were worthy of noting. The first tenet was *challenging the dominant ideology*. Since racism

advanced the interest of White people, there was very little interest in doing anything to address

it. This phenomena, coined material determinism, may explain why very little has been done in

the effort to overcome racial injustice. However, CRT proponents do not sit back idly but

challenge the traditional thinking. The final tenet is *social construction* theory which identified

race as categories and products of social thought not concrete biological identifiers. Therefore,

the dominant society can manipulate or use race to advance its interest when necessary (Delgado

& Stefancic, 2001).

Key Tenets of CRT

For the purposes of this review, three CRT tenets were examined: The Oxford

Dictionary (2015) defined *racism* as "Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against

someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior." Delgado and

Stefancic (2001) stated that *racism* was a normal part of society, and was an everyday experience

for most people of color. Since it was everywhere it was difficult to address and potentially

solve. *Racism* was also prevalent in the educational system. William Tate IV (1997) believed

that aspects of the educational system characterize people of color as inferior. The traditional

White middle class American was the standard to what other groups are compared to and

therefore biased against Black students. CRT places race front and center of the operations of

the school and as an indicator of the level of *racism* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Evans, 2007a; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Solorzano, 1997). Ladson-Billings (2005) took this a step further by stating that unfortunately *racism* is a normal experience for the Black culture and is a permanent fixture in their lives. Therefore, one strategy to absolve this injustice would be to expose *racism* in its various forms in educational institutions. For the purpose of this review, *racism* was divided into two components, institutional *racism* and individual *racism*. It was apparent that *racism* does exist within school districts and regrettably Black students have to maneuver around the system of racism in order to be successful.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), *colorblind* thinking assumed that equity can be achieved by applying the same rules to everyone across the board. Colorblindness was evident in the school system where staff proclaim that we treat all students the same and in a fair manner regardless of race. The problem was that school personnel can downplay the perspectives of people of color in a colorblind system. Therefore, schools do not address the diversity of academic and instructional needs (Yosso, 2005).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) racial minorities lived in a world where they are unjustly characterized by their race in contrast to White people. As a process of healing from racism, it was important that people of color have opportunities to tell their stories about their experiences with racism. Storytelling was also a method of explaining racial subjection and provides insight into how to deal with racism. The telling of stories was important because they add context to the apparent objectivity in society (Ladson Billings, 2005; Solorzaro, 1997). Those with of racial minority status were urged to recount their experiences with racism to explain their perspective to White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

These three key tenets of CRT: *racism, colorblindness*, and *storytelling,* were critical to understanding the experiences of Black students in the educational system, and were explored

throughout this review of the literature. In the following sections, I outlined the existing research on Black students' experiences with taking AP courses through the lens of these three key tenets of CRT.

Racism. Classroom level interactions between staff and students can either have a positive effect on Black student performance or can be detrimental to student success. The school setting also takes on a collective belief system based on the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of the school personnel and therefore can impact the educational experience for Black students (Evans, 2007a). Billings and Tate (1995) argued that the causes of poverty in society, in conjunction with the racism in schools, were institutional and structural in nature. Lea (2000) established an insightful definition of institutional racism as:

> collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (p. 220)

Utilizing the CRT lens can prove effective in the examination of these collective beliefs with an emphasis on racial values. Denzin (2001) concluded that the interactions between different racial groups involve the preconceived notions about the other racial group. The faculty decision making takes on a complex wedding of their beliefs and social interactions. This was evident in Evans (2007a) study of three suburban high schools and their responses to demographic change described later since repeatedly staff indicated that their interactions with Black high school students and families influenced not only their actions but overall school response.

The organizational identity within a school district shaped how issues were defined and members' behavior either maintained or modified the characteristics of the educational

institution. This was particularly evident when the school had undergone recent demographic change. Duke (1995) conducted his research at Thomas Jefferson High School and identified a collective culture of academic excellence at this school. Therefore, when Black students began attending the high school in increasing numbers, the response by school administrators and faculty was to continue operating as they had in the past. Teachers rallied around the school's high expectations and curricular rigor without any consideration for the new students moving into the community. The emphasis was on Black students' adapting to the perceived excellent academic environment of the school rather than a school response that would engage and partner with Black students and their families. The unique histories of schools and communities can influence the overall school identity, which in turn can influence the faculty's interpretations of race and how they respond to situations (Evans, 2007b). Since the vast majority of educational institutions are staffed by a clear majority of White faculty and administration, Black students have to navigate through their educational career under the dominant White culture that permeates the schools.

Another study by Holme, Diem and Welton (2013) focused on a large suburban district in San Antonio, Texas and its response to demographic change. The initiatives centered on changes in the arena of curriculum and instruction; however the effectiveness of these initiatives were jeopardized by a lack of attention to normative and political issues within the district. Since there was a lack of change in norms to adapt to the growing racial diversity in the district, the district officials responded in ways that were culturally unresponsive and deficit oriented. This resulted in potentially effective programs actually reinforcing deficit perceptions held by teachers. From a CRT perspective, this type of deficit thinking would need to be addressed as a system and a more racially sensitive approach implemented by school personnel to compliment reform efforts.

It is essential to hear the voice of Black students and their experiences with institutional racism. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used CRT to examine the experiences of Black students in Wells Academy. This academy is located in an affluent White area in which only 7% of the students are Black. This was particularly relevant since Black students can often time feel alienated and silenced due to racism in a predominately White elite school (Datnow & Cooper, 2000). One student interviewed was Jasmine who stated that, "Everybody knows that racism exists and that people are racist. So when it comes out, they (faculty and students) aren't that surprised that it is there" (DeCuir & Dixson, p. 26). Another student, Malcolm observed racist behavior from a student and inconsistencies with the disciplinary system. A white student had made an internet profile that included racist remarks and threatened to shoot and kill a Black student. Malcolm was on the disciplinary council (the only Black member) which reviewed the incident. The council recommended expulsion for the actions of the white student. However, the headmaster came back to the council and explained why the student could not be expelled as he looked directly at Malcolm. "Now Malcolm, I know that you're Black and I know that you're the only Black person on this council, how do you feel and why do you think he should be expelled?" (p. 27). Utilizing a CRT approach would have examined the impact of the hate speech as well as the governing system at Wells that perpetuated the racist system. This was a significant example of how CRT can be useful in the examination of a school system to expose racism and how institutional structures can perpetuate continued wrongs. Another example of racism was when Barbara was told by an administrator not to wear a dashiki during a day in which students could dress out of uniform. From the administrator's perspective this head gear violated one of the school's policies; however, to the student it was insensitive to African culture. Collectively these stories of racism in the school demonstrated what Black students experience throughout their educational experience.

Unfortunately, racism in a variety of school settings can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation for Black students. These feelings can be even more intense in schools where there are small numbers of minority students (Andrews, 2012). Structural features that exist within the school like tracking and discriminatory policies can also heighten the negative feelings that Black students have toward their school. It was incumbent on school district personnel to limit the Black student's exposure to institutional racism within the school setting so that they can reach their academic potential.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated that racism is the "usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (p. XIV). If racism is so prevalent in society therefore it also exists within the school systems as teachers interact with their students. Wellman (1977) defined racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of intentions, defend the advantages of the whites" (p. 4). Welton and Martinez (2013) in their research concerning racial isolation within a racially mixed high school highlighted the presence of some faculty in schools that are reluctant to change in how they operate and unfortunately had negative racial attitudes and stereotypes. It is important to identify the racist tendencies and actions that individual school personnel exhibit in the school setting. These actions can be overt and blatant in nature; however, they were more likely to be subtle and more covert. Racial microagressions, or subtle racial insults, can also inflict emotional and psychological harm on Black students (Andrews, 2012). Black students were sensitive to these microagressions and staff may not even realize the effect of their actions. Black students entering predominately White environments can encounter discrimination and racism (Griffin, 2006). Harmon (2002) conducted a study in which students encountered being taunted by White students and staff members that assumed that the Black students lack the necessary intelligence.

Andrews (2012) divided racial microaggressions into two categories of spotlighting and ignoring. Spotlighting occurred when Black students were extremely visible by Whites when they may not want to be. One example was when slavery was discussed in History class and Black students were expected to know about the subject and discuss it with the class. Also, racial ignoring was when Black students were invisible to White students oftentimes when the Black student may want to be seen or heard. Some examples of ignoring were the devaluing of thoughts of and making minimal eye contact with Black students. The use of derogatory language was a more overt example of racism and transcends both spotlighting and ignoring (Andrews, 2012). Andrews identified how the students in the study demonstrated resilience and overcame racial microaggressions, but the research fell short of informing the reader of the role of school administration and other school personnel in establishing a more culturally responsive learning environment for Black students.

Andrew's (2012) interviewed high achieving Black students that attended a predominately White High School. One student recounted the use of the word nigger during literature discussions. The teacher allowed the students to say the word nigger when reading the passages aloud. One Black student in the study recounted as one student who said the word "so freely, and I just like, OK I'm about to spaz!" (p. 34). This type of derogatory language was implicitly supported by the teacher by allowing the word to be used because it was in the American literature being studied. Overall, participants in this study articulated a strong awareness of racism in their school and developed their own strategies for dealing with it (Andrews, 2012). This is a qualitative look at one high school where students were provided a voice. It is safe to assume that Black students experience these types of assaults throughout the school systems across the country.

Evans' (2007a) study on suburban school response to demographic change discovered in her study that almost all of the school personnel in the study thought Black students were louder, less motivated, less prepared and more confrontational that White students. These types of stereotypical beliefs from school personnel can also lead to an increase in teachers over referring Black students for disciplinary infractions for behaviors and Black students becoming frustrated by the perceived unfair treatment (Andrews, 2012; Evans, 2007a; Gordon, 2012). Whether it was entrenched institutional racism or individual students or staff members that held racist beliefs and their actions or words become overt, it was clear that any racism can have a negative effect on Black student achievement.

School personnel exhibited attitudes and actions that were discriminatory in nature towards Black students. Ladson-Billings (1998) believed that Black students endure daily indignities that take its toll on them. When these examples of racism were either skimmed over or ignored it made sense that Black students may not want to fully participate in the discussion of the day. Research conducted by Griffin (2006) concluded that minority students can feel uncomfortable in more affluent high schools. Black students in the advanced track shared how they felt about how they were treated in the high school. One example included a Black male student who was labeled as an athlete by staff members, and this stereotypical treatment potentially impacted his access to AP courses. Also, some minority students in AP courses expressed that they could not afford to be wrong when answering questions in class because of follow up derogatory comments that were often made by fellow White students. In summary, Black students endured racial stereotypes that can impact their access to various educational programming (Alien, Bonous-Hammarth, & Suh, 2003; Griffin & Allen, 2006).

Color-blindness. A CRT analysis can also uncover color-blind racism within educational institutions. Color-blindness is the concept of treating all students in an educational system the

same. On the surface it sounds equitable, but it can have a negative effect on minority

achievement because it does not take into consideration the unique perspectives and background

of minority students. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described color-blind ideology as treatment

that is the same across the board. Color-blindness is one of the most blatant forms of

discrimination, but does not address more subtle forms of racism. According to Parker (2010),

color-blindness is embedded within educational institutions. He emphasized that the current

political and legal climate dictated that schools operated in a race neutral manner and assume

meritocracy. Crenshaw (1995) continued with the concept of color-blindness in the law as

"sustaining hierarchies of racial power" (p. xxviii). Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2010) in his book,

Racism Without Racists, identified "color-blind racism" and warned that "despite its suave,

apparently nonracial character, the new racial ideology is still about justifying the various social

arrangements and practices that maintain white privilege"(p. 211). The belief that color-

blindness will eliminate racism is not only shortsighted, but assumes that racism is simply

personal rather than systemic (Lopez, 2003). Unfortunately, color-blind ideology is prevalent

within suburban schools.

Color-blindness is particularly evident within a suburban school setting. One study

analyzed suburban school districts that were undergoing rapid demographic change and the

impact of district level policies on local school practices (Welton, Diem & Holme, 2013). The

district leadership in the study was found to be uncomfortable talking about race as a color-blind

culture developed within the district hierarchy. There was more a willingness by the staff at the

local school level to discuss race and the ongoing demographic change. Since state and federal

accountability measures in schools demanded an increase in academic achievement for all

students, various initiatives were introduced in order to improve minority achievement.

However, these initiatives failed to take race into consideration. Therefore the attempt was made

to improve student learning through improved instructional strategies in a race neutral manner. Even though the district was conscious of the racial inequities that existed, it implemented race neutral strategies that produced ineffective results (Welton et al., 2013). Bonilla-Silva (2010) argued that color-blind perspectives regarding race relations tended to maintain the current racial stratification rather than help break down the barriers. Individuals who endorsed a color-blind ideology also tended to espouse more prejudiced views.

> I contend that whites have developed powerful explanations which have ultimately become justifications for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color. These explanations emanate from a new racial ideology that I label color-blind racism. (p. 2)

Similarly, Rousseau and Tate (2003) demonstrated how math teachers were color-blind by failing to acknowledge racial inequities in achievement and the potential role of racism in creating these inequities. The teachers reported that either there were not any differences in achievement or it could be accounted for by socioeconomic status of the student of color rather than the potential of systemic racism within the school itself. The teachers' color-blindness prevented them from reflecting on how their teaching practices may impact Black students' achievement.

Color-blindness also manifested itself in curriculum development. Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson (2002) found that district officials expected teachers to follow the same curriculum across a diverse district utilizing the same materials in the same order and on the same day. This type of uniformity meant that all students received the opportunities at the same time. A color-blind curricular approach stifled the teacher's ability to respond to social and racial context and was not responsive to the lived experiences of the students (Milner, 2002). For the aforementioned reasons, in the advent of the implementation of the Common Core State

Standards curriculum throughout the country, advocates of CRT will need to be at the forefront of challenging a national scripted curriculum that promotes the continuation of White dominated curricular priorities and find ways to infuse making connections to Black high school students a priority rather than strict district alignment across the board with disregard for the role of race.

  Storytelling. CRT can be used to examine teacher interactions with students of color and what occurred in those interactions that can encourage students to achieve (Chapman, 2007). For the purposes of this review, the terms storytelling, counter storytelling, and counter narrative will be used interchangeably. A primary method of teachers reaching Black youth was the use of narrative that can connect teachers with students (McVee, 2004; Milner, 2008; Kerl, 2002). Storytelling is a method in which minority students are able to tell stories about their experiences with racial subjection and how they must contend with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This type of counter storytelling is defined by Reynolds (2010) as a "methodological tool with a history in communities of color that use oral interpretation to convey stories and struggles often not validated by the dominant culture" (p. 148).

  Solorzano and Yosso (2001) conducted a study of Latino and Latina graduate students and explored the concept of counter storytelling. They explained that while the narrative can support the view of the majority, the counter narrative challenged the view of the majority. This was instructive since the Black community had a rich tradition of telling stories. By listening to the stories of the graduate students, the researchers validated their viewpoints and daily struggles with racism. Ultimately the goal was to overcome the racist viewpoints that existed in the school community and transformed the system. Listening to the counter stories of minority youth also helped establish a more culturally responsive organization. Sharing of stories was an essential component of Black culture, and in return it was important that White administrators and faculty listened to these stories and reflected on how Black students' perceptions can impact how they

operated within the school system. Unfortunately, if the school personnel were not listening and applying the information to their practice the dominant ideology was not challenged and the status quo continued.

Milner (2008) examined teachers and students at Bridge Middle School, a school that was known in the area as an effective school and was comprised of about 60% Black students. Mr. Hall was a teacher who was able to connect with Black students even though he was White. He used stories of struggle and growing up poor to establish common experiences with students to connect with his students' stories. It was this concept of building relationships within the classroom that was critical (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Milner, 2008). Student achievement within his classroom increased when he implemented more racially conscious teaching practices (Milner, 2008). His connected with students, engaged in discussion with students, and heard their stories which led to results.

Counter narrative also provided a different route than the traditional classroom approach to connect with youth by emphasizing the background and experiences of students (Chapman, 2007; Milner, 2008). These lived student experiences can be used to deconstruct and reconstruct what was taught in the classroom to students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Milner's (2008) study at Bridge Middle School introduced Mr. Jackson as a teacher who allowed the counter narrative of students to impact his teaching. He worked to create connections with students to value learning because it was relevant to their lives. By allowing students to share their unique perspectives and interests he was able connect to the lived experiences of his students. Even though Mr. Jackson was Black, he believed that ultimately it was this exchange of ideas with students that enabled him to be an effective teacher, not simply being Black (Milner, 2008). Gutman and Midgley's (2000) investigation of middle school students uncovered similar results in his study of 62 Black families that were living in poverty. Ultimately, finding a different way to engage a

student does not necessarily involve deficit thinking. Concerned and caring teachers that found a way to reach students, and instilled in them the confidence and capability to perform was critical to reaching Black youth.

The positive message from these studies was that teacher interactions can influence Black student performance in the classroom. Whether it was the teacher sharing their own stories or listening to the stories of the students, when a teacher connected with students and attempted to understand their lived experiences, learning occurred. It was important to allow the students to assist in determining their own learning experiences through their eyes. Ironically, these were tendencies that any committed teacher could follow in the classroom. The emphasis was more on connectedness rather than on instructional strategies or methods to convey content to students. By school personnel allowing Black students to tell their stories of racial discrimination, it provided the staff an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the perspective of their students and build a more culturally responsive environment. Often times the storytelling was occurring within a school setting that was entrenched in the cultural and social capital of the White middle class.

Social and Cultural Capital

The examination of the culture that existed within a society was an important enterprise. The genesis of the framework cultural capital came from Pierre Bourdieu (1986) in his groundbreaking work "The Forms of Capital." He specifically stated that the theory:

Made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. (p. 241)

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Cultural capital refers to the habits and dispositions that facilitate a society's cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Habits, dispositions, values, attitudes, and behaviors were skills acquired through socialization and referred to as habitus (Bourdieu, 1981). Habitus refers to the various internalized schemes through which people perceive, understand, appreciate and evaluate the world (Bourdieu, 1981). Habitus is generated by social conditions and experiences because it encompasses skills, behaviors, dispositions, sensibilities, ways of acting, etc. that people develop in response to conditions or situations they encounter (Bourdieu, 1981; Horvat, 2003). When a person's habitus is aligned with the values of a social institution with which he or she is interacting, then habitus becomes embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1981; Horvat, 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Embodied cultural capital refers to behavioral styles, ways of speaking, cultural preferences, and understanding of valued cultural knowledge that cannot be purchased or exchanged but can be learned (Bourdieu, 1981; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). More importantly, habitus becomes embodied cultural capital when it is used to assist people with navigating through a system or institution to achieve a goal (Bourdieu, 1981; Horvat, 2003).

Based upon Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) definition of cultural capital, only the knowledge of the middle and upper classes was deemed to be valuable in the United States and minorities were perceived as lacking the cultural capital necessary for social mobility. Bourdieu (1981) further stated that social and cultural capital was used to reproduce existing social and economic structures. Similarly, Lamont and Lareau (1988) referred to cultural capital as "institutionalized, widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion, the former referring to exclusion from jobs and resources, and the latter, to exclusion from high status groups" (p. 587).

This provided a useful method to explain why inequality existed in the educational system. Those families that had more cultural capital became involved in their child's education and which contributed to their child's success (Ringenberg, McElwee, & Israel, 2009). Schools were not neutral institutions but reflected the goals of the dominant members of society (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Sullivan (2001) confirmed that cultural capital was transmitted within the home and can have an effect on standardized scores. If the student does not have the required transmitted capital then he or she would struggle in navigating through the educational system. Since the school system was acculturated with the cultural capital of the upper class, the status quo remains in society. This highlighted the importance of attempting to restructure social institutions in the United States around the community cultural wealth of People of Color (Yosso, 2005). Those that are not constituents of the dominant class of society may not have the cultural capital to maneuver successfully within the school system. The members of the non-dominant group of people tended to not engage in the school and did not achieve as much academic success. Hence it is important to establish school systems that reach out to bridge the gap between the dominant culture and those that exist outside the traditional viewpoint.

Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) considered social capital as a personal asset that provides tangible advantages to those individuals that are better connected. His focus was on the inequalities that exist and the replication of the status quo. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as a social network that improves the outcomes in a system and leads to improved behaviors. According to his research families needed to adopt certain norms to improve the chances of their students.

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's (1997) social network theory emphasized the institutional and ideological forces which hindered minority student's access to social capital. He developed the framework that focused on the relationships between youth and institutional agents and how

those relationships affect the acquisition of needed cultural capital. The development of constructive relationships between school personnel and minority students was critical. School personnel could provide consistent and reliable support to minority students that were working on their decoding skills.

Studies on the importance of social capital in educational contexts have proceeded largely on the basis of examples provided by Coleman (1988, 1990) and, in particular, examples of networks connecting the parents of school peers and parent-child relations. Social capital was understood in terms of a set of social relations that enables the reciprocal monitoring of children by the parents of peers, thereby increasing participation to behavioral norms that can affect school performance (Coleman, 1988). Since there was this divide between the capital that existed within the school environment and the capital at home of the minority student, the school and its personnel became the mechanism by which minority students could access opportunity. Four keys to establishing a more equitable school system that facilitated the Black student acquisition of cultural capital was the establishment of a supportive culture, parent outreach, counseling and mentoring, and positive peer groups.

Institutional support that encourages acquisition of social and cultural capital. A supportive school culture and environment was important for Black students to acquire the necessary social and cultural capital to be successful. The United States Department of Education (2015) established three essentials to having a safe and supportive climate; engagement, safety, and environment. An engaging environment included building strong relationships between students and staff, and students becoming actively involved in school activities because they felt supported. Students needed to feel physically and emotionally safe in their learning environment. Thirdly, the environment referred to the physical walls of the building as well as the social emotional supports in place to assist students.

Being engaged in the classroom and the learning process promoted a sense of belonging for students (Osterman, 2000). A sense of belonging was critical for adolescents because it made them feel as if they were accepted in the school community (Osterman, 2000). More importantly, a sense of belonging promoted positive social connections amongst students and between students and adults, which lead to increased access to social networks and social capital (Lareau, 2003; Osterman, 2000). A sense of belonging also promoted cultural capital because students who felt as if they were part of a school were more likely to acquire the cultural capital of the mainstream, which was the cultural capital that was valued by American public schools and American society (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

When students felt connected to the school, they were less likely to display behavioral problems, lower interest, lower engagement, and lower achievement (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Osterman, 2000). Students who felt rejected or alienated were more likely to drop out than students who felt that the school climate was supportive of their culture and identity (Osterman, 2000). Minority students in smaller settings felt that the school climate was more supportive of their culture and identity because they were able to forge relationships with key personnel (Conchas, 2006). Increased personalization, therefore, led to enhanced social and cultural capital which could lead to more access to school resources, academic support, and social support (Lareau, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Osterman, 2000).

Parent programming in schools and individual school staff engaging parents can lead to increased connection for students to the school environment. Solorzano (1992) uncovered a gap that existed between families of color and White families with regard to college aspirations and actual attainment. Even though most parents of color wanted their children to go to college, their students often times did not attend four year higher education institutions. A disconnect existed where aspirations did not translate into accessing college. Yonezawa and Oakes (1999) explored

why some students were in the honors track and others were not. They determined that the more

education and money that a family had the more likely they were to intervene on their child's

behalf. This did not mean that minority families were less involved, but this involvement may

not manifest itself in the same manner as the more affluent family. Another critical point in the

study was the role of the parent in pushing their student towards success. Two cases were

examined in which a White student and Black student were denied entry into an honors class.

The White parent, that happened to be a stay at home mom with a college education, struck a

deal where she would get her son a private tutor so that he could take the honors class.

Eventually the school made an exception to the policy and allowed her son to be in the class.

Another Black parent, a single parent and high school dropout, was told that her son could not be

in the higher class and accepted the policy (Yonezawa & Oakes, 1999). It wasn't the case that

the Black parent was not interested in the student's education, but rather that she was unfamiliar

with the political process that could have yielded another decision for her son. In the study

described above, the placement decisions of 19 students were analyzed by the researchers. The

educators were not responsible for the inequities within the student's communities; however,

they should have had an understanding of the parents and families in the communities in which

they served in. The educational system should have taken responsibility that both students

described earlier were treated differently and should have done what it could so the system was

fair for all. In short, educators should know how to reach out to the various parents in their

community. The school system had an important role to play in knowing the parents in their

community and how to reach them (Yonezawa & Oakes, 1999). It takes determined leadership

to transform a school into a center that encouraged opportunity for all, and sought ways to

convince students to challenge themselves. Unfortunately, finding these types of leaders can be

very rare (Khalifa, 2010). However individual counselors and mentors can make a difference.

Teachers, counselors, and fellow students can serve in the role of mentors for students. In a study of low-income minority youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) teachers emerged as very important participants in students' core support networks. Students often turned to teachers that they trusted when needed support from parents, family and peers was considered inaccessible. Teachers were an important source of social and cultural capital for low-income minority students. Teacher's personal expectations, the quality of instruction, and ability or inability to distribute cultural and social capital effectively had a dramatic effect on underrepresented students. Unfortunately, little research exists that examines how teachers can provide valuable forms of social and cultural capital to students. In a study conducted by psychologist Robert Rosenthal (1998), teachers' attitudes toward their students were shown to have a substantial impact on their academic performance. Rosenthal identified three effects: (1) pupils who were expected to do well tended to show gains; (2) pupils who were not expected to do well tended to do less well than the first group; and (3) pupils who made gains despite expectations to the contrary were regarded negatively by the teacher. Unfortunately, teachers often assessed middle class and non-minority students as having higher abilities than their low-income and minority peers (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Thus, students' assessments of their own academic abilities can be impacted by teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, Stanton-Salazar (1997) stated that the teacher heavily relied on instructional methods and assessment practices grounded in the cultural capital of the dominant group. Since these practices do not highlight the intellectual resources and talents of minority students, these students were often assessed as poor performers.

School counselors also acted as agents of support for students. Counselors had an important influence on students' motivations and expectations, especially through the provision of information regarding college preparations (Fallon, 1997; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Tierney, Corwin, & Coylar, 2005)**.** For low-income and underrepresented students there was the

additional problem that many see counselors not as allies or sources of support, but as gatekeepers who all too often refuse them admission to AP. The basis for these decisions was commonly cited as students having low-test scores or being ill-equipped to take on the challenges of more rigorous coursework (Oakes, 1985). This was particularly troubling for low-income minority students. In a study of African American and Latino students, Paul (2002) found that these students were more likely to have their college plans influenced by high school counselors. These were the students who were less likely to have college preparatory counselors, and more likely to have counselors pulled away from college counseling tasks. Inadequate counseling impacted college entry and completion for underrepresented students. One study found that a lack of counseling or inadequate counseling had been found to be a major barrier to college preparation. It was this lack of college preparatory counseling which was often absent for low-income minority high school students and offered an explanation of why there was an under enrollment of low income students in college (Plank & Jordan, 2001). Plank and Jordan also concluded that efforts to improve high school counseling and equalizing students' access to these services would likely have a significant impact on improving college access for underserved populations. Counselors were in the unique position to directly impart both cultural capital and access to social networks that had shown to positively influence college access and, ultimately, completion.

Research supported the notion that peer groups not only make a difference, but they have a positive impact. Youniss and Smollar (1985) pointed out that peer groups enable youth to develop a mature sense of who they are. Additionally, Epstein and Karweit (1983) determined that peers influence achievement and behavior. Researchers have also found that students whose friends have college aspirations are more likely to go to college, while those who befriend

students with no college-going aspirations were less likely to attend a postsecondary institution (Tierney et al., 2005).

For many years, research about peer influence in adolescence was particularly negative. Negative peer pressure influenced students to get involved in forms of misconduct which included: alcohol and drug use, illegal or dangerous activities, and apathy toward school (Tierney et al., 2005). Peers have been thought of as a sub cultural group that provides agency for youth to resist the dominant culture on the one hand and as a way for youth to navigate multiple and conflicting worlds on the other hand (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001). Stanton-Salazar (2001) argued that peer group formations played a crucial role for minority youth if rightly conceptualized and orchestrated. Unfortunately, minority youth may perceive peer groups in a way that inhibited college aspirations. As a result, the benefits that peer groups offered may not be realized by minority students. Research to date had not shown the definitive influence peer groups had on college access and completion for low-income minority youth. It was apparent that the seeking out of peer groups was a practice that could affect the academic choices of minority students. According to Stanton-Salazar (2001), the goals of social network theory were to articulate more accurately the "various and simultaneous ways class, gender, race, and ethnic forces affect the daily lives of low-status adolescents, particularly in the development of adolescent relationships and social support systems" (p. 210).

Exclusionary structures that affect acquisition of social and cultural capital.
Tracking is the process of sorting students by academic ability into certain groups. This can be a particularly destructive practice in schools where minority students tended to be grouped into lower tracks with low expectations and performance. Jeannie Oakes and Amy Stuart Wells (1998) studied ten reform minded schools to see how they attempted to create high standards for all students. They noticed that in these systems the staff became disenchanted with the

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established tracking systems in their school. They saw a discrepancy in the number of minority students accessing rigorous curriculum compared to White students. Most of the schools studied eliminated remedial tracks as a way to change the status quo. However, attempts to break down barriers so that all students can access the best curriculum can encounter "formidable cultural and political obstacles" (p. 41).

Karolyn Tyson (2011) examined the varied experiences of high-achieving Black students in 19 North Carolina high schools. She analyzed why some high-achieving African American students found low-achieving courses and peer groups attractive while other students did not. She pointed out how the honors tracks were dominated by White students and the lower tracks by Black students. This "racialized" tracking not only separates the races, but also linked academic success to being White.

Another study revealed that there was disagreement amongst the teachers on how much tracking existed, even among teachers teaching at the same school (Watanabe, 2007). This type of confusion can lead to misinformation being given to students looking for upward mobility within the academic tracks. Secondly, they believed that the use of test scores to determine placement was an unfair process. Test scores do not account for the individual motivation or true ability of the student. This was especially complicated by students who moved periodically and may not had the opportunity to take the high stakes test. A final relevant point was that teachers prepared more for AP courses than regular, core level classes (Watanabe, 2007). This could affect student motivation in the regular class if they detect that their teacher was not fully engaged. Then why should the student rise above the mediocrity of their present situation?

Another destructive practice in schools was how teachers recommended whether or not students took core level classes or higher level classes. Yonezawa and Jones (2006) collected student data from 12 schools from 2000 to 2002. They found that most students thought that the

process for students to select their classes was inequitable. They did not have faith in the teacher

recommendation process or that the teachers were acting in the best interest of the students. For

example, in a study of 297 mathematics and English classes in low-track Math and English

classes, low-income minority students were exposed to less rigorous course content, and were

generally not expected to learn the types of skills required to succeed in college (Oakes, 1985).

Tyson (2011) determined in her studies on students of color accessing higher level

courses, that teachers and guidance counselors could act as gate keepers and restrict access to the

more rigorous curriculum. School personnel with low expectations for minority students

unfortunately can lead to less minority students being recommended for rigorous curriculum.

Therefore, it is critical to understand the cultural capital Black students possess that influences

them in their educational journey.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) uses Critical Race Theory to challenge long-established interpretations of

social and cultural capital theory. Bourdieu (1977) defined cultural capital as the habits and

dispositions that facilitate a society's cultural heritage. The cultural capital consisted of the

values and customs of the dominant White middle class that tended to be reproduced over time.

Using CRT, Yosso (2005) critiqued Bourdieu's articulation of social and cultural capital theory,

which assumed people of color lacked the capital needed to engage in social mobility. However,

CRT shifted the focus away from the traditional White culture and highlighted the culture of

people of color and the cultural strengths that they possess. The key for school districts was to

accentuate the cultural strengths that existed within the minority community in order to connect

minority students to academic success. It was this appreciation of community cultural wealth

that had the potential to transform the educational process.

Yosso (2005) used CRT to highlight six forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital) that contributed to the concept of community cultural wealth. Communities of color have cultural beliefs and assets to offer that should be incorporated into the collective values of the school. The first example of this type of wealth was aspirational capital. The emphasis was on maintaining hopes and dreams regardless of the obstacles that existed. The concept was for people to overcome their current circumstances to aim for a brighter future. Secondly, linguistic capital exists in communities that experienced more than one language or style. Even though most Black families did not speak a second language, in many cases communication styles differed within the Black community than in the school system. Familial capital represented the cultural beliefs that represented a community history and a broader sense of family other than immediate family. Within the Black community a strong bond existed amongst themselves that helped them come together. Fourth, social capital referred to networks of people and community resources. When Black students were able to access these networks, then they had the supports necessary to help them succeed. Black students could take this information gained and relay it within the community to benefit others. Navigational capital referred to the ability to maneuver through the social institutions. A Black student maneuvering in a school setting that did not take into consideration the cultural beliefs of the student would be an example of navigational capital. The final type of capital was resistant capital. This referred to the skills and ability to engage in behavior that challenged inequality. This may take the form of overcoming various forms of racism that existed in current structures and transformed them into a more equitable system.

Yosso's (2005) explanation of cultural community wealth could provide a roadmap for school personnel to be more culturally sensitive. Therefore, it is essential to look at school practices through a racial lens to fully understand what is happening in our schools. For

example, a school counselor could become familiar with the forms of capital in the community of wealth and highlight these beliefs to encourage Black students to take an AP or honors course. Future qualitative research focusing on a school district can look for evidence that the members of the educational organization understand the multiple strengths within the Black community and celebrate these assets rather than focusing on perceived areas of student deficiencies or by focusing solely on the existing cultural capital in the White dominated school.

School Leadership in Demographically Changing Schools

While this literature review had touched upon school wide practices that could encourage or inhibit the academic achievement of Black students, it was important to examine what the research indicated about the role of school leadership in the shaping of a culturally responsive high school that has undergone demographic change. There was limited research to date that has focused on how suburban school district leaders have responded to the demographic shifts occurring within their schools (Holme et al., 2013). A few studies have started to highlight the importance of school leadership in a suburban school district that was becoming more racially diverse. Holme et al. discovered that administrators focused on the various technical responses to the increasing diversity in their district. Examples of the responses included changing structures within the schools by hiring instructional specialists and academic deans to support teachers. Staff development included training staff on differentiated instruction and administrators learned how to analyze data and disaggregate the data and track assessment student performance. While these efforts were needed, the effectiveness of these initiatives was jeopardized by a lack of attention to normative and political issues within the district. Without addressing the values and beliefs within the school community, the reforms efforts will not succeed (Holme et al., 2013).

Another study by Madsen and Mabokela (2014) highlighted the work of European American and African American principals in schools in which student demographics were changing. The European leaders used a more color-blind approach and missed opportunities to address the racial overtones within their schools. The African American principals used a more color conscious approach by addressing these racial issues as they arose. Therefore it was important that the principal needed to be able to address the differences to prevent further conflict. The "leaders must create trust, establish teams that dispel stereotypical roles for students of color, and promote dialogue of pedagogical differences in responding to the learning needs of students of color" (p. 95).

Although the research of Camille Cooper (2009) occurred in elementary schools, it informed the discussion on the need for leaders to be cultural change agents within the demographically changing school. The leader needed to reject the stereotypical ideologies and color-blind traditions to transform the school. More specifically, the cultural work should include "broadening their cultural knowledge, engaging in critique and resistance, and building coalitions within diverse groups to promote cultural responsiveness, educational equity, and social justice" (p. 696). The data in this study indicated that the leaders in these schools were unwilling to address the cultural tensions and create an environment that emphasized cultural inclusion.

These studies have provided a foundation of research for my study to explore the role of the school district leadership in addressing the demographic change in a suburban school setting. The leaders in these studies have fallen short of providing the necessary guidance to develop a more inclusive setting for all students. Further research is needed to continue to point out the flaws in the approaches that are occurring or highlight the work of leaders that are addressing the needs of all their students.

Research Gaps

While there is growing research in the examination of the experience of Black students in primarily White suburban high schools, most research had focused on Black students in urban settings (Gordon, 2012). In addition there is a lack of quality research on the effect of stereotypes and racism in a predominately White high school setting (Griffin, 2006). Furthermore, there is a need for more research in the area of high achieving Black students (Andrews, 2012; Griffin, 2006; Wiggan, 2014) and how they succeed in a largely White public school setting.

While research continues to grow in the arena of White suburban schools experiencing demographic change by a number of researchers who focus on school response, more research is needed that specifically examines how school leaders response effects Black students' ability to access a rigorous curriculum. Quality research is also lacking in the arena of established cultural capital in schools that have undergone demographic change and the role of social capital in reaching minority students to take rigorous curriculum. Furthermore, more research is needed looking through the cultural capital and CRT lens together to explain why Black students are not signing up for advanced coursework.

More research is also needed in the role of school leadership in providing access to AP coursework for Black students in the suburban high school setting that has undergone recent demographic change. School leaders should have an awareness of the destructive nature of racism and colorblind thinking within the school and the importance of accentuating the use of storytelling as a way to connect school personnel and Black students. At the same time the school administrator should have an understanding of the cultural capital that exists within their school and the importance of facilitating the social capital throughout the building to support

initiatives to encourage Black student participating in AP coursework by highlighting the community cultural wealth that exists within the minority school community.

This case study examined why Black students were not accessing AP courses in a suburban high school in which more Black students are attending than in the past. I examined through the lens of CRT to identify some of the factors that may have contributed to this phenomenon. It was also critical to examine the cultural capital that existed within this suburban high school and the social capital that was utilized to make a difference. The findings of this research will shed light on what was occurring within the high school, which in turn will inform how to solve the dilemma.

Conclusion

This review of the literature had set the stage for my research in which I conducted a case study of one high school that had undergone recent demographic change that included an increase of Black students. It was clear that there was research which indicated that cultural gaps existed between Black students and the culture within a White dominated high school. It was also evident that the staff within the school impacted Black student involvement academically in either a positive or a negative manner. The school system can also be viewed through the racial lens. Racism can permeate the school system itself and can become entrenched through approaches such as color-blindness. School personnel can have a positive effect on Black students overcoming the racial inequities by giving Black students a voice through counter storytelling or staff can reinforce existing racial disharmony. The Black students also had a role in determining their own future by relying on the merits of their own culture and values and learning how to successfully maneuver through the educational system. This case study provided detailed information on the approach of one high school and provided insight into what was effective and what was not.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) believed that research questions were important because they brought focus to the data collection and helped organize the study. They should be open ended with a concern for the process rather than cause and effect. The research question should be simple and limited to a sentence or two. There were three research questions that informed this case study.

1. How do the institutional structures within the high school impact Black students' access to rigorous curriculum through taking AP courses?

2. How does the staff within the high school build relationships with Black students to access rigorous curriculum through taking AP courses?

3. How do Black students navigate the institutional structures within the high school to access rigorous curriculum through taking AP courses?

Explanation of Methodology

My research was a qualitative single case study. A case study is the investigation of a bounded system (Creswell, 1998; Merriam 2009). By using the social and cultural capital and CRT framework, I examined a single suburban high school that has undergone recent demographic change to see how one school has approached increasing Black students access to AP coursework.

Site Selection

I selected a suburban high school that has undergone recent demographic change that had seen an increase of Black students. According to Creswell (1998) the context for the case study should be established, which included the physical, social, historical, and economic setting. This was helpful to personalize the study so that the reader could develop a picture of the school district and the community. I researched the history and culture of the school district and the

community since it was relevant to understanding how the school had adapted to demographic changes and therefore whether Black students were provided equitable academic opportunities.

Participant/Sample Selection

Merriam (2009) addressed the question of how many subjects to interview. There was no clear specific answer; but what is needed is an adequate number of participants to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study. I interviewed three school counselors to document a variety of perspectives. Since there are only six school counselors, three participants was ideal. A district administrator and a building principal were also interviewed to gain an understanding on the administrative perspective on Black students taking AP courses. I also interviewed eight students who identify as Black/African-American and their parents to get a first-hand perspective on their perceptions of how the high school has met their needs. Five parents participated in the study to get a perspective on the home environment that the students grew up in and the parental role in course selection.

In a case study, sampling will occur through either random or purposeful sampling with criteria established to guide the process (Merriam, 2009). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that "you want to make sure that you sample widely enough so that a diversity of types are explored" (p. 68). In this study, the sampling was random based on the willingness of staff, students, and parents to participate. I made posters to recruit students and these posters were displayed in the guidance office area. A school announcement was also made to secure student participants in the study. The guidance counselors were also notified of the study so they could discuss with students on their caseload if they were interested. The eight students in the study all volunteered for the study. The parents of students that are participating in the study were contacted to see if they would also like to participate. The five parents in the study all volunteered for the study.

I also reviewed school documents and policies related to how students gain access to AP courses. Often policies and procedures are established to govern how students register for classes. In some cases, test scores, teacher recommendations, and class limits can impact which students take AP classes. Regardless of whether the intent was to limit opportunities, it was critical to explore what was happening within the school to assess whether equal access was occurring.

Finally, observations of school counselors as they meet with Black students making their course selections were important to get an up-close look at what was really occurring during the registration process. I sat in the actual course selection meeting and took field notes on the interactions between the guidance counselor and the student. I did not ask questions but strictly observed these meetings.

Data Collection

The reader should be able to describe the data-gathering process used in the research study. Examples could be issues with gaining access to the site, data collection methods, the length of time spent gathering data, and the amount of data collected (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam, using open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews allows for increased flexibility.

I conducted semi structured interviews, observations, document review, and field notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), field notes are "the written account of what the researcher hears, see, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (pp. 118-119). Descriptive field notes are notes that capture a slice of what is happening including the setting and conversations with people. The second type of notes are considered reflective that capture the frame of mind and concerns of the observer. This is a

more subjective side to the gathering of data, but still important for the observer to record their impressions at that moment in time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) states that data analysis is "'systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings" (p. 159). After the data was collected through interview transcripts, observations of guidance counselors, and reviewing of pertinent school documents, the data was reviewed for the coding of themes that emerged through the analysis. These themes informed the findings and recommendations portion of the study.

Triangulation/Reliability

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to reliability as the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data. Reliability also refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. This is difficult since qualitative research involves studying human behavior, but it is important to ensure that the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). The reliability and transferability of the results will be up to the reader and how similar their circumstances were to those depicted in the case study. It was a single case study; however, it was an in-depth look at the process or lack thereof of Black students taking AP courses. Ultimately, the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2013).

Trustworthiness/Validity/Data Quality

Validity refers to the thinking in terms of the reader or user of the study. The reader can decide if it applies to his or her situation, but there should be enough detail to give the reader a clear picture of what was going on to make the decision if it is valid (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam, triangulation is used for internal validity by "using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in

different places, or interview data collected from different people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people" (p. 216). I conducted semi-structured interviews in which the questions were established in advance, but I allowed the interviewee to respond regardless of whether the question is addressed. I then transcribed the interviews and ultimately compared to other transcripts to see if common themes emerged.

In my observations I took extensive field notes with quotes of key information. I also kept a watchful eye for body language and other mannerisms that could be relevant to the study.

Finally, I looked through the school report card for key information and reviewed school documents that pertain to students taking AP courses to provide a context to the school studied. I also compared key school data to two other school districts of similar size and student demographics. This comparison will allow the reader to see how Valdosa allocated resources for students compared to two similar school districts. A research study has achieved quality triangulation of data when information from the three data sources all point in the same direction (Yin, 2013). Asking the same question in the different sources of evidence was ideal especially when the answers all point in the same direction. According to Yin, the vulnerability of the single case study is the results and findings may not concur with the researcher's expectations prior to the study. Therefore one has to carefully investigate so there is no misrepresentation and access as much data as possible. It was my goal to allow the data to tell the story rather than to have preconceived notions of what the data should be. Triangulation in my study occurred by conducting interviews of administration, guidance counselors, a teacher, Black students and their parents and guardians, school document analysis and observation of students registering for courses with their counselors.

Reflexivity

I am currently a director of student services at a suburban high school district that has seen recent demographic change. It was important to not allow my preconceived notions of how administrators should lead to influence the data collection in the study. As discussed in the beginning of this study, less Black students enrolled in AP classes than Hispanic and White students across the United States. I wanted to research whether this is a phenomenon that occurred at a similar high school to the one that I have worked in. If so, I would uncover why this was occurring and look at potential solutions to this dilemma.

Context

Valdosa is a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The US Census Bureau estimated the population at 41,734 as of 2013. This was a large increase over the past years as the population was at 4,500 in 1990. As the population grew in Valdosa during the 1990's and 2000's, so did the percentage of Black families as the Black population grew by 3,000 percent from 2000 to 2010 (Keen, 2011). Valdosa East High School (VEHS) also reflected the changes that were occurring in the overall population.

VEHS is one of four high schools in Valdosa School District 100. Valdosa School District 100 is a large unit district that services 27,879 students based on the 2015 state Fall Housing Report with 9,146 high school students. In 1990, the district counted five schools and about 3,500 students. District 100 experienced remarkable growth between 1997 and 2008. During that period, District 100's enrollment increased by about 1,000 to 2,700 students a year. The district's enrollment growth stopped when the recession hit in 2008.

VEHS was the original high school in the district and currently VEHS has an enrollment of 2057 with a Black student percentage of 8%, a dramatic increase that had occurred over the past 20 years, with the current count of Black students at 164. The Black population measured at

1.3% in 1998, but increased over the next 18 years to 2.4% in 2000, 7.4% in 2010 and 8% in 2016. Anecdotally, the current principal of VEHS started at the district in 1995 as a dean of students and recalled that there was only one Black student in the entire high school when he started. The demographic breakdown for other races at VEHS for 2016 was 60.8% White and 24.6% Hispanic. In 2000, White students comprised 89% of the high school population and Hispanic students were at 7%. As the student population grew, Valdosa South was the second high school in the district opening in 2001. Two more high schools opened in later years as Valdosa North opened in 2005 and Valdosa Central in 2008.

Some additional pertinent information on Valdosa School District 100 is included to provide further context. VEHS has a low income rate of 28.6% which is below the state average of 50%, but has increased by 6% in the past five years. District expenditures per pupil are below the state averages. Per pupil operations is $9,567 compared to the state average of $12,821 and per pupil instructional is at $5,795 below the state average of $7,712. The district also pays its teachers less than the state average of $63,450 with an average salary of $56,862. The average class size in VEHS is 23 which is more than the state average of 21. Seventy-two percent of the graduates of VEHS attend a two to four year college within 12 months of graduating, which is above the state average of 68%.

Table 1

School District Comparison

District	Low Income	Class Size	Per Pupil Operations	Per Pupil Instruction
Valdosa	23.1	22.8	$9,567	$5,795
Sunnyside	20.8	22.1	$9,284	$5,056
Arlington	14.3	27.5	$11,053	$7,209

To provide further context, two other large unit districts near Valdosa are listed in Table 1 above and referred to throughout this section. The student's demographics are similar in all three districts. While Valdosa has 28 schools, Sunnyside has 21 schools and Arlington has 31 schools. Valdosa has the highest low income count of students, but it is in the middle when it comes to class size and spending per pupil for operations and instruction. This data indicates that Valdosa expends resources on supporting students in a similar manner as Sunnyside and Arlington.

Finally, it is clear that the vast majority of staff and administration at VEHS are White. 92% of Valdosa school district teachers and administrators are White, with 4.6% Hispanic and only 1% Black. In 2010, 94.7% of staff at Valdosa school district teachers and administrators were White and 1% Black; however, in 2005, 99% of the teachers and administrators were White with no Black staff. This data indicates that very slow progress has been made in the diversification of staff at Valdosa. In comparison, Sunnyside has 92% of its teachers and administrators White, with 5.3% Hispanic and 1% Black. Arlington has 89% White teachers and administrators, 4% Hispanic, and 2.8% Black. With the exception of a higher number of Black teachers and administrators (2.8% higher) at Arlington, the other staff demographics are similar for the three districts as there is a lack of diversity on the district's staff compared to the student demographics. In a review of the current administrative and guidance counselor teams at VEHS, the entire administrative and guidance counselor teams are White.

Chapter 4: A Color-blind System

Color-blind Mind-set

Any educational institution takes on a collective mind-set which is composed of the viewpoints of staff that work within the system. This mind-set is heavily influenced as initiatives are directed from both District Administration and Building Administration. In order to make initiatives a reality, it takes teachers and support staff to implement the system that have direct frequent contact with the students. In an attempt to understand the collective mind-set at Valdosa School District 100 and Valdosa East High School (VEHS), I conducted interviews of a District Level Administrator, Building Administrator, three counselors, out of six counselors in the school, and a highly regarded AP teacher. This district and school were chosen because it represented a typical suburban high school in Illinois that has undergone recent demographic change. The data shared earlier demonstrated extremely low rates of Black students enrolling in AP courses and taking AP tests. A clear theme that emerged from these interviews was that a color-blind mind-set was pervasive from the top to the bottom of the educational setting. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), color-blind thinking emphasizes the concept of equity by establishing rules that are applied to everyone the same across the board. This can be evident in the school system where staff proclaim that we treat all students the same and in a fair manner regardless of race. The problem with this concept is that school personnel can downplay the perspectives of people of color in a color-blind system. Therefore, schools do not address the diversity of academic and instructional needs (Yosso 2005). In Valdosa School District 100 and VEHS there was no coherent mission to increase minority student access to AP courses.

AP Structure at VEHS

VEHS staff collect data on students enrolled in AP courses. In all there are 25 AP courses for students to choose from at VEHS. The number of AP courses offered was similar to Sunnyside with 30 AP courses offered and Arlington with 28 AP courses offered. VEHS had seven Social Studies AP courses, including U.S. History, Microeconomics, World History, Psychology, Government, Human Geography and European History. The Science Department had six AP courses including, Biology, Chemistry, Physics Part 1, 2 and C, and Environmental Science. Math had four AP courses including Calculus AB, Computer Science, Statistics, and Calculus BC. The two AP courses in English were English Literature and Composition and English Language and Composition. The remainder of the AP courses were as follows: French Language, Spanish Language, Spanish Literature, German Language, Music Theory, and Studio Art.

In 2011, there were 338 students taking an AP class at the high school and by 2016 there was an increase to 417 students. This was in spite of a decrease in the total student body by 159 students over the same time frame. Two hundred thirty-five White students took an AP class in 2011, and there was an increase to 286 students in 2016. There was also an increase in participation for Latino students over the same time frame. In 2011, 67 Latino students took an AP class and 77 enrolled in an AP class in 2016. However, a closer analysis of Black student participation rates reflected a decrease of 50% from 22 Black students taking an AP course in 2011 to 11 Black students participating in 2016. Therefore, out of all the racial groups at VEHS, Black students have consistently had the lowest participation rate.

Other pertinent AP data came from the College Board which kept track of AP tests taken and the scores of the students. The scoring range on an AP test is 1 through 5. Five is the highest score and a 1 is the lowest score. A score of 3, 4 or 5 is considered a passing score by

the College Board. In 2011, 328 AP tests were taken by students at Valdosa East High School. By 2015, the number rose to 447 AP tests taken. White students accounted for 212 AP tests taken in 2011 with a mean score of 3.00. Sixty-eight percent of White students received a 3 or above on the AP test or a passing rate. In 2015, 301 AP tests were taken by White students, an increase of 89 tests taken compared to 2011. The mean score for these tests was 2.64 with a pass rate of 52%. However, even with the lower pass rate, there were 12 more AP tests passed in 2016 than 2011. Latino students took 61 AP tests in 2011 with a mean score of 2.81 and a pass rate of 56%. By 2015, the number of AP tests taken by Latino students increased to 79 AP tests taken with a mean score of 2.24. The number of Latino students passing an AP test decreased from 35 AP tests passed to 24 AP tests passed. To summarize, more White students and Latino students took AP tests in 2015 than 2011. However, this was not the case for Black students.

Black students took 11 AP tests in 2011 with a mean score of 3.27 and a passing rate of 73%. In 2015, only five AP tests were taken by Black Students with a mean score of 2.4 and passing rate of 40%. Black students were the only Ethnic group at VEHS who had a decrease in AP tests taken, mean score, and passing rate on tests. Overall, only about 7% of Black students took an AP course, which was less than the 23% of White students and 15% of Latino students who took an AP course in 2015. While the overall student population at VEHS were taking more AP classes and exams over the last five years, Black students have experienced less participation in both access to AP classes and taking AP exams over the same five year span. An examination of the course enrollment process for students including the teacher recommendation process may help explain the lack of AP participation by Black students.

District Administrator

Table 2 can be used for reference to review the interviews with the two administrators. Adam was the director of curriculum and instruction who had worked for the school district for

four years in a position that oversaw the educational programming for all four high schools. He

was clearly influenced by his formative years as he grew up poor in a rural community where

education was not a point of emphasis in the community. He was able to complete his doctorate

two years ago and credits much of his academic and workplace accomplishments to competing in

sports in high school and having a coach that valued his education and convinced Adam to

pursue higher degrees. He was able to overcome adversity growing up in a low income

household and believed that anyone can be successful that grew up poor.

Table 2

District Administrators

Name	Prior Profession	Years in Current Position
Adam	PE teacher, Dean, Assistant Principal	District Administrator 4 years
Dan	Agriculture teacher, Dean, Assistant Principal	Principal VEHS 15 years

He was proud of the 25 AP courses offered at all four high schools, He believed AP

programming was a great opportunity for student to gain college credit and referenced the new

law in Illinois that if a student scores a 3, 4 or 5 on the AP test, state colleges and universities are

required to offer college credit. Public Act 99-0358, passed by the Illinois General Assembly on

August 13, 2015, provided that a student who took a College Board Advanced Placement

examination and received a score of 3 or higher on the examination was entitled to receive

postsecondary level course credit at a public institution of higher education. According to Adam,

another reason to take AP courses was because it looked good on college applications. College

admissions staff can see that students were looking to challenge themselves academically.

Another key philosophical point was he was an advocate of duel credit. Duel credit is when a

student takes a class and it is offered as credit at a community college or some colleges and

universities depending on the class. For example, a student can take a duel credit course in Culinary Arts and then if passed receive credit for the same course offered at a community college, Therefore, he saw "AP can be used more for admissions to elite universities." However, this thinking can be problematic if students that were not perceived as "elite university" material were potentially steered away from taking AP courses into a dual credit course.

When assessing the effectiveness of the AP programming, "we look at numbers and results" and this was the data that was shared with the board. More specifically, how many kids were participating in the class, how many were testing and how many were receiving a 3, 4 or 5 on the AP test? When asked about the discrepancy of significantly more White students taking AP courses than Black students, he indicated "there is a lack of emphasis on the school's part." He believes that it was a problem everywhere and when pressed on why Black students have low participation rates in AP programming answered "they might not be getting it at home and if they are not getting it at home, they might not be getting it at school." This was a troubling racial stereotype and assumption that the home might not be supporting AP participation. This viewpoint may be attributed to growing up in a rural community and the two districts he worked in prior to Valdosa were less diverse environments. He believed the building administration and staff needed to look for ways to improve AP access for minority students rather than emphasizing district level oversight. He believed in universal encouragement for any student that may have the interest or potential to take AP courses. He genuinely desired that minority students challenge themselves academically yet he made no distinction between White, Black or Hispanic. He preferred to focus more on low income and higher income students. He does not think it was a "racial thing," which was further evidence that there was no discernable strategy or point of emphasis to close the gap of AP participation rates across racial groups. Finally, he

consistently referred back to his own background about being poor and how low income students

needed encouragement because like his family, they were unaware of the intricacies of the

educational system. Ultimately, the lens in which this district leader was approaching the

district's AP programming was primarily color-blind.

The teacher recommendation process of recommending students for either core level or

advanced classes will be covered in depth later in this section, but Adam referred to the process

in the interview. The teacher recommendation process was when the teacher of a student

recommends whether he or she should take either a regular or advanced class (including AP) for

the next school year based on their performance in the class they are currently in. This

recommendation was provided to the counselor and was referred to when the student signed up

for next year's classes. Adam acknowledged that this process could hamper efforts for all

students to have access to advanced classes, although he defended both the process and that the

teachers' intentions were not to keep students out of more advanced curriculum. He did believe

in students taking on the challenge of advanced coursework, but defended the practice of having

the student fill out a level change form if the student wanted to take an advanced class against the

teacher recommendation. The level change form will be described in depth later in this chapter,

but it was a form that a student must fill out and obtain signatures of certain staff members if he

or she wanted to take an advanced class against the recommendation of the current teacher.

Adam indicated that this form must be filled out so "three weeks from now when you're failing,

we don't want mom or student to come back and say you didn't tell me that this class was this

hard." "It is more of a cover your ass kind of thing than trying to keep kids out. It could have an

unintended consequence of keeping up that barrier or that extra requirement." It was important

to note that as Adam was talking, his body posture changed as his head lowered as he realized,

perhaps for the first time, that the practice of making students fill out a form and collect multiple

signatures to override a teacher recommendation was in effect potentially keeping students out of a more academically rigorous curriculum. This type of reflection in a school administrator was admirable and demonstrated an openness to change; however, he stopped short of suggesting changes to the system, almost like the color-blind system was too entrenched.

Principal

Dan, the principal of VEHS, was retiring at the end of this school year. He came to the school in 1995 as a dean of students and had over 35 years of educational experience overall. When asked about his philosophy toward students taking AP courses at the high school, he immediately turned to 12 to 13 years ago when there was a Director of Curriculum named Hector Suarez. Hector emphasized minority students taking AP courses, but he didn't just talk about it. He came into the building and researched minority students that were not accessing rigorous curriculum and sat with them to discuss the possibility of taking AP courses. Dan saw this as the most effective way to improve minority participation. He also mentioned a certain AP physics teacher he described as a "Spitfire". He explained that the passion this teacher had for the subject and helping students is another example of how to improve participation rates. This teacher actually broke down the AP data over the past several years and most of his students score either a 4 or 5 on the Physics AP class. He also had study groups at least two times a week from about 5 to 6 pm at night to support the students. He also described how they had established an AP parent meeting in which the merits of AP were explained. Also AP Human Geography was now offered to freshman to expose them to the AP experience early and hopefully build up the skills for later AP participation. What was noticeably absent from his comments was any ownership of improving AP participation for students. Dan also never discussed any initiatives he and his staff had been a part of to improve participation rates or performance of minority students in AP classes. Dan taught in another district that was less

diverse than Valdosa earlier in his educational career. For this reason, perhaps he was not well versed in culturally responsive practices. Regardless of the reason it was clear that the color-blind approach was evident in the building administration as well.

The question of what kind of data was looked at by the principal was also enlightening. He explained how teachers primarily review the data of AP performance in their classes and the district office also examined the AP numbers. He explained how the teacher recommendation process also studied specific data as they attempt to find the appropriate academic levels for students. The teacher recommendation was based on 8th grade Explore testing. The ACT, American College Testing, Explore test is a predictor of a future score on the ACT test typically taken junior year in high school. 8th grade teachers looked at the Explore test score and how the student performed in their class to predict where they should be next year. He also stated that students were also encouraged to push themselves. He added "I don't think we treat anyone different" in the process when asked why there was such a low Black participation rate in AP courses. He believed that the family influence was a factor in why there were less Black students taking higher level courses. "They don't put that much into academics" was the racial stereotype that demonstrated there was no initiative from the building principal to encourage Black student access to AP coursework. The color-blind mind-set of the principal was as long as all students were treated the same they had the same opportunity.

The principal reiterated his commitment to have everyone go to college. Whether that meant Joliet Junior College or a higher level university, there were opportunities for all. He emphasized the advent of "open enrollment" a few years back as a major achievement. Open enrollment meaning that if a student wanted to take an AP classes they could. However, when I asked Dan if the multiple signatures on the level change form might be challenging for a student

to secure and potentially keep a student from taking an advanced course, the principal had very little to say other than "maybe they are not AP material if he can't get through that process."

Dan also had a clear vision for students to be involved in making the school a better place and serving in the community. He was an advocate of junior and senior students mentoring underclass students and assisting them in developing effective academic habits and referred to the guidance counselors as advocates for students that can make a difference.

Guidance Counselors

There were six counselors at VEHS. Table 3 can be used for reference for the interviews of the three guidance counselors. Dana, the first counselor interviewed, had been at VEHS for 11 years. Prior to that she was a probation officer, and grew up in a Chicagoland suburb on the more affluent side of town. However, she indicated that she has always been sensitive to helping others from an early age. She took a class in college in African American History and the more she learned about the history of African Americans "saddened her." As a White female, she married a Black man and had two children; however the marriage did not last. She indicated that she was still very sensitive to the needs of her own kids and that they had the same opportunities as White students.

Table 3

Guidance Counselors

Name	Earlier Profession	Years at VEHS as a Guidance Counselor
Dana	Probation Officer	11
Cindy	Special Education Teacher	12
Scott	English Teacher	1

Dana heralded the idea that the high school had an open admission policy for students to take advanced courses, including AP classes. However, she did believe that this should be within reason. Her perspective was that as some students may not be prepared for AP rigor and should not be encouraged to take higher level classes. "Those students that are doing well in regular classes are strongly encouraged to push themselves to the highest degree." She later clarified students earning A's and B's would be a good guideline on what performance is worthy of moving up a level. When asked about the teacher recommendation process, she had confidence in that system that the majority of students followed the teacher recommendation. She described that students had the first 15 days of each semester to either move up or down a level based on how they perceived the class they were in. Although she indicated that in order to do this there were "some hoops." The first hoop was the Level Change Form. The student needed the signature of his or her parent, teacher, department chair, and an assistant principal in order to move up a level from a regular course to an advanced course   The question of how does the student know who the department chair was as well as the assistant principal in essence was up to the student to navigate and unfortunately the student only had 15 days from the start of the year to contact and convince the appropriate people to sign the form. If a signature was missing then the change does not occur. The second form was the Declination Form in which the student and parent acknowledged that they were going against the recommendation of the teacher. This form had to be filled out prior to the start of the semester. It indicated that you were taking the class against the teacher recommendation with the understanding "we're not going to let them change back if we initially advise them not to take the class. They are stuck there for at least a semester." The counselor indicated that it was "pretty rare" for her to recommend an honors class. What she typically did in this type of a situation was to tell the student to go back and have a conversation with the teacher about changing their recommendation. If the teacher

changed their recommendation then the other forms were not necessary. Unfortunately, once again it was up to the student to go have a sophisticated conversation with a teacher to change their mind and take the time to email the counselor. This was another example that the selection of AP courses by students was not exactly an "open system" unless the teacher recommended the higher level course. A further point of research that would shed light on how the teacher recommendation process affected Black students would be data analysis of the teacher recommendation process by race and whether there were discrepancies on how White, Black and Latino students were recommended for AP coursework and if certain departments within the high school were more inclusive than others.

When I asked Dana what was done to encourage Black students to take AP courses her response was "I would like to think that African American students being no different than any other student, I don't think my approach has anything to do with their racial background." This color-blind approach reflected her emphasis on whether the student had the skills to be successful in the higher level class rather than encouraging Black students to challenge themselves academically. She took it a step further by saying that we did not have very many African American students and not many of these students took AP courses. "It's a very small percentage." Her response suggested that since there are a relatively small number of Black students at VEHS, their underrepresentation in AP courses was not as prevalent of an issue. Yet it was important to note that the Black students in the study that had Dana as a counselor believed that she genuinely cared for them. She listened to their concerns and was willing to assist them in their academic goals. She demonstrated an ability to reach out to Black students and encouraged them to challenge themselves academically even though she approached students in a universal manner.

The second counselor interviewed was Cindy. She started out as a Special Education teacher, but switched to counseling because teaching students with special needs was very challenging and she feared burning out over time. She had a very interesting background as she was an only child of a single mother. They traveled all over the county together as her mother looked for nursing work. One particular two year stint was at an Indian Reservation. It was here where she was the only White student on the reservation. Unfortunately she was called names and harassed as not fitting in during 4th and 5th grade. This stuck with her and she was sensitive to potential racism in the school system. But her reaction to these events solidified her color-blind belief that all students should be treated the same. She said "as an individual, I don't really look at skin color when dealing with them in terms of what their abilities are." She also had a strong belief from her mother not to depend on others to support you. Her mother always supported her needs growing up, but did not depend on the government or other people. She had taken this view in encouraging her students to own their education and to work hard to overcome obstacles.

When it comes to the actual course selection of students, Cindy encouraged students to better themselves and "push the envelope a little bit." When asked about AP courses she indicated she was recently looking at AP scores. She was disappointed that in some areas AP participation and scores are stagnant. On the other hand she cited AP Psychology and AP Calculus as having impressive scores. She believed that this drives participation levels. As students obtained college credits, by word of mouth students will gravitate toward those courses in the future. Meanwhile, scores in AP Government and Chemistry had not been as good and the school officials should look into why. This type of reflection was encouraging that she was interested in the identification of problem areas in the AP programming and exploring potential solutions. However, absent from her analysis was the participation rates of minority students and

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their average AP test scores which were lower than the White students at VEHS. When asked about the lack of minority participation in AP coursework she referred back to historic test scores.

As pointed out earlier, Valdosa School District 100 is a unit district. Students were tracked early on in Elementary School because of their score on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. Cindy claimed that the system did not take into account the work ethic of the students in elementary school and rather focuses on these scores to place students in certain tracks. The thinking being that students that worked hard and get good grades may not access the most rigorous curriculum. The effect was multiplied over the years as students miss out on being challenged over their formative years. Dana's consideration of academic tracking in the elementary schools identified a practice that potentially could impact AP access for students. This could be a point of further research to access the tracking practices in elementary and middle school and see the racial background in the various levels. Unfortunately "college bound students get stuck in there" referencing the regular classes in high school because they got good grades and they had not pushed themselves in to higher levels. When asked if the system was part of the problem, she indicated that it probably is. She responded that the forms used in the registration process to admit students into AP courses without teacher recommendation were used to protect staff members. However, in spite of that she followed the established procedures as the other counselors did. She admitted that "we don't have the flexibility and the teachers to move kids so fluidly, that if they drop, we're scrambling and overfilling regular classes when they all say they want to do that." This comment conceded that the reason why too many students were not pushed to higher levels is because of scheduling and hiring. This process of students registering for next year's classes occurred in the spring the year before, and if for some reason student enrollment suddenly dropped it could upset the hiring process, class sizes and

perhaps have a financial impact. Whether this was done by design when the registration process was created, the reality was this was a real effect. When asked how to reform the system. She responded that the teachers needed to be more open-minded on who can be in an AP class. Often teachers told students that AP courses were too difficult and you would be doing homework all night long. If teachers were more encouraging then perhaps students would take a chance on an AP course. "Teachers drive programs" was her final comment. Cindy believed that the teacher recommendation process was subjective and further analysis could provide insight into why there is a lack of AP participation by Black students.

Scott is in his third year as a counselor, his first at VEHS. He taught prior in a rural community in Central Illinois for two years and then moved to the Chicagoland area. He had a pre-determined system that he went through when registering a student. He reviewed the course recommendations from the teachers and made sure that the student was signed up for all requirements before moving on to electives. If he encountered a student that wanted to make the leap to AP he took some time to talk to the student. In his opinion he wanted to make sure that the student had a strong work ethic and understood the long hours involved in being successful in an AP course. He also wanted to see that the student had well thought out post-secondary plans. He believed that some students wanted to go against the teacher recommendation just for the "prestige" of being in an AP class or because their friends were. "They don't understand how difficult it is." Sometimes they can be successful, but sometimes they were not. When asked if he had discussions with students that wanted to take an AP course, but he convinced them not to, he paused for a few moments and indicated he follows "the same process no matter the background of the student. I do the same procedures." His answer repeated the mind-set that treating everyone the same in a color-blind manner was the right approach.

When the question of why Black students were taking AP courses at such a low rate and if there was a way to increase participation, his answer was remarkably hands off. He did not believe there was anything that was holding back Black students, but he thought that there may be self-esteem issues and students lacking confidence. He also made the stereotypical assumption that parents may not have taken AP courses and may not understand the AP experience. He suggested an AP parent night in which to help educate the parents. This type of assumption that Black parents were uninformed and students didn't have the confidence to be in AP courses coupled with a color-blind approach of following the same registration process for everyone suggested that Scott was not readily encouraging Black students to take AP courses. However, Scott was a counselor who paid attention to detail and wanted his students to be successful in the most appropriate academic setting. He was a young educator with a lack of experience in diverse educational settings. He would benefit from equity training described in the recommendation section of this study. In addition to a student's counselor, teachers also play a large role in whether Black students gained access to AP coursework.

The AP Teacher

On three different occasions, I had staff members recommend that I speak to an AP Physics teacher, Chuck, who had increased student enrollment into his courses. Chuck had taught at VEHS for ten years and taught AP Physics as well as regular Physics. The district administrator, principal, and counselor all thought that his insights would provide valuable information on this topic. Chuck immediately responded to the request to talk and brought with him folders of evidence on what he was attempting to do in his AP classes. He finished his master's degree from the University of Illinois in Natural Sciences. He believed that there was an access problem to AP, but not based on racial inequality but skill deficits. His goal was to raise awareness within the educational system of the unit district to increase the rigor throughout

the student's educational career so they were ready for AP coursework. He did not mind being a lone crusader for this cause since he had such a passion for the subject material. A review of the data indicated that his passion was contagious for students. Over the same five year time frame there was an increase of 25% of students taking AP Physics. However, there was no noticeable increase or decrease in the amount of minority students taking the course. When asked about that discrepancy, he indicated that his goal was to reach out universally the same way to all students regardless of background and find students that love Science. With this color-blind mind-set he offered no other ideas to improve minority participation. However, it was interesting that there was no notable connection to any AP access reform efforts within the school.

The AP Class

I observed one of Chuck's AP Physics classes for one class period. Of the 14 students in the class there was one Black student named Kendrick. He indicated that his reason to take this AP class was because he was bored in a core level class. He discussed his desire to move up a level with his family at home, but ultimately it was his decision and he was glad that he did. Fortunately for Kendrick, his Science teacher junior year did recommend him for a level change so he did not have to navigate the level change and declination form to take the course. He was at extreme ease within the class environment as he revealed that he had friends in his class and he had been in the band for all four years of high school. The overall environment was very comfortable as students reacted to the questioning of the instructor in an energetic manner. Participation levels were high as students not only answered questions but offered thought provoking questions which assisted on other students learning. It was clear that Chuck built a strong rapport with his students and he was very flexible as students worked on practice problems collaboratively or independently. An example of the commitment level of the

instructor was the additional support that he offered students. The next day was going to be an institute day in which the students were off and he had meetings to attend throughout the day. However, he was going to come back to the school at 4:00pm to offer more practice sessions as the AP exam was quickly approaching. Many students indicated that they were planning on attending and offered to bring some snacks as well. The overall environment was very positive with a relatively small class size of only 14 students. One would think that a few more students could really benefit from such an environment as the instructor and the students were helpful.

Teacher Recommendation

Administration and staff members at Valdosa School District 100 described the course selection process as an "open enrollment" system for students to sign up for advanced courses. One might think that an open system would imply that if a student wanted to take an advanced course they would be able enroll. However, a closer examination demonstrated that there were two color-blind structural barriers within the VEHS educational system that could make it difficult for students to challenge themselves academically. The first barrier was the teacher recommendation process and secondly the process of how a student still attempted to take a higher level class even if the teacher did not agree.

The course selection process for students' occurred in the spring. A mailing was sent home to the parents of the students to alert them to the course registration timeline. Parents were directed to the school website where they could fill in a course selection form online that the counselor used at registration. If the form was not filled out then the counselor reviewed the required courses and electives with the student during a one on one meeting held in the auditorium at a table on the stage. The students interviewed reported that they were satisfied with the course selection process and did not have any suggestions for improving it. Once the

courses were selected parents were notified through mail what courses their son or daughter

signed up for, and had an opportunity to contact the counselor for any changes.

VEHS had a teacher recommendation process for the core subject areas of Math, Science,

and English that impacted the courses selected by the students. Social Studies and electives were

not subject to teacher recommendation. At the end of first semester, all the teachers in Math,

Science, and English for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors recommended either the regular

class or an advanced class for each student for the next school year. The teacher independently

went on the student information system for the school and entered the recommendation on an

icon that the counselor can see. This teacher recommendation process was overseen by an

assistant principal who also governed the guidance department as well as the building of the

master schedule of the school. Each academic department (Math, Science, English, and Social

Studies) also had a division chair to lead the department. Their thoughts on minority students

taking AP courses was not a part of this study, so their role in the process was not clear.

However, it appeared that the process of teachers recommending courses for their students for

the next school year was somewhat subjective. When the counselor signed up the student for the

classes they referred to the icon and the recommendation. Each counselor interviewed and

observed registering students mentioned the teacher recommendation icon in the process. As

pointed out in the literature review, the teacher recommendation process can inherently be a

barrier for students to sign up for AP classes if the teacher did not recommend the student take

the class. Tyson (2011) determined in her studies of students of color accessing higher level

courses, that teachers and guidance counselors can act as gate keepers and restrict access to the

more rigorous curriculum. There was no check and balance in the teacher recommendation by

the assistant principal or the division chair, it was simply the teacher making the

recommendation without collaborating with other teachers. In essence, it was the opinion of a

single teacher. It was clear the critical role that teachers have in setting the academic pathway for students.

Imani was observed registering for next school years courses with Scott, her counselor. The session started with a review of the student's credits and current courses. The student was in Honors U.S. History and Honors English 10. She was signed up for Advanced Government; however, Imani's English teacher recommended a regular English class for next school year. Scott asked how Honors English 10 was going. The student responded that she really was not prepared for how hard the class was going to be, but she started to figure out how to be successful. She recalled how her English 9 teacher had encouraged her to take Honors English 10. "She kept telling me I could do it and it gave me confidence." In spite of this, the counselor indicated that the teacher recommendation for English next school year was for Regular English 11. The student responded with "I don't think she knew what I really wanted to do. I want to continue and take an AP course next school year." Scott indicated that she had a 73 % in her current English class, the student responded that she had a 75 %. Then inexplicably the counselor said "well, I guess you want to wait and see let's just leave you down for English 11, but I'll put down to revisit." This meant that Scott would call her down to his office later in the school year to see what she wanted to do. Rather than the student making a case for taking the higher level course she said nothing as Scott continued with the rest of the session, which included selecting elective courses. In this case, a Black student who wanted to take an AP course in English did not sign up for one even though she was earning a C in a current Honors English class. It was an example of how a teacher recommendation coupled with the influence of the guidance counselor prevented a Black student from taking an AP class that she initially wanted to take.

Level Change Forms

If a student did decide to override a teacher recommendation, there were two forms (See Appendix A and Appendix B) that needed to be filled out prior to the student being enrolled in the AP course. When these forms were created was uncertain; however the principal recalled that the forms have been around as long as he had been at VEHS which was over 20 years. The first form was called a level change form. On the form, the student needed to fill out his or her previous academic history, or grades, in the department. Secondly, they needed to list their recent test scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math. Third, the placement recommendation from the teacher was recorded as well as the level change request. Finally, the form had to be signed by the student, parent, teacher, divisional chair, assistant principal, and the counselor. One can only imagine the challenge for the student to locate all the people. This also included the teacher that recommended the student for the regular course which could be uncomfortable for the student, because basically he or she were telling the teacher that they were wrong. Finally, a meeting with the assistant principal explaining your viewpoint could also be a challenge. If the form did not have all of the required signatures, the counselor cannot sign the student up for the course. It only took one person to disagree and the process ended there. Even if this daunting task was accomplished, there was still another form to complete.

The Declination Form was a second form that informed the student and parent what the student was in for when signing up for a higher level course than the teacher recommended. In this agreement it stated "I understand that the teacher and department chair do not endorse placement in the requested course based on my child's academic performance predictors and current achievement. I understand that supplemental academic support may be necessary to assist my son/daughter, and take responsibility for providing or assisting with the needed resources or remediation." Basically the school personnel were washing their hands of providing

support for the student who was willing to take a chance and take a more difficult course. There were not supports within the school system for Honors or AP students to seek out if they were struggling. However, the form continues with, "I also understand that my child will remain in this course and level until the end of the semester/year." This implied that the student should be careful what you ask for because if it does not work out, you cannot just drop back down to the regular class. It appeared to be a punishment for not following the recommendation of the staff. Cindy, a counselor in the study, described this form as a way to "cover our ass" in case it does not work out. Unfortunately, there was no data collected on how many students took the forms and got them filled out. Even more importantly, how many students became disheartened of the process and never got to realize the opportunity they initially asked for. This would be an area of ongoing research that could inform the magnitude of the issue of having these forms in place.

Synthesis

VEHS espoused an "open enrollment" system for students to access AP coursework if the student chose to. While this was technically true, there were steps that a student had to take if their teacher did not recommend the advanced class. Multiple signatures of staff members they did not know were required as well as a commitment to sticking with the advanced class for at least a semester regardless of how they do could indeed be intimidating. Then there was the scenario witnessed during registration when Scott in essence talked a student out of attempting an AP class since the teacher recommendation was to move a level down to a regular class. This was in spite of the student having a 75% in the class and the two forms necessary to take the AP course and override the teacher recommendation were never presented to the student. The teacher recommendation process can provide access for students if the teacher recommended the advanced course. However, if the teacher recommendation was for a regular course, the required level change and declination forms necessary to fill out in order for the student to override the

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teacher recommendation and take an advanced course were potential barriers that could discourage students from gaining access to rigorous curriculum.

After interviewing a district administrator, a principal, three counselors, and a highly regarded AP teacher several themes emerged. To begin with, everyone had a desire for students to take AP coursework, but there was no discernable effort to encourage Black students to take AP coursework. The color-blind mind-set expressed by participants in the study that all students were treated the same, including the same resources allocated for all students demonstrated a lack of emphasis on culturally responsive approaches to encouraging Black students to access AP coursework.

Another theme was that none of the staff interviewed acknowledged that very few Black students taking AP courses was a problem. Therefore, none of the staff took ownership of their role in solving the problem. The District Administrator emphasized that building staff need to take responsibility for the encouragement of minority students to take rigorous curriculum. The principal reminisced of the time when a district administrator directly met with minority students to discuss the merits of AP coursework. The three counselors all followed the established procedures for students to take honors level courses. The two female counselors had more of a passion to push students academically as their approach was influenced by their experiences growing up. The third counselor simply followed procedure and appeared to have no strong views on the subject. The AP teacher was more than willing to take any student with an interest in AP Physics regardless of color or background, but his overall motivation was to increase the number of all students enrolled in AP Physics not necessary provide additional supports to encourage students of color, who were grossly underrepresented in advanced courses, to enroll in AP classes. At VEHS, if a student had the skills and work ethic as defined by those in a position of authority then the student could sign up for an AP course. Another observation was that the

entire building administration, counselling staff, and the AP teacher were all White. While the racial background of those staff in a position to influence access to rigorous curriculum was not the only factor that could influence student choices, it exacerbated the access environment when there was no discernable strategy to encourage AP participation. Now that the school system of course selection had been analyzed, it was critical to examine the process from the Black student perspective and their parents. The next chapter examined how Black students navigated the educational system at VEHS in order to access AP coursework.

Chapter 5: Social and Cultural Capital

The participants in this study provided a broad cross section of the Black population at VEHS.   These students demonstrated in the interviews that they were well spoken and reflective on how they have accessed AP or Honors programming. Only one Black student interviewed was originally from Valdosa. The other students were from Chicago, the Chicago suburbs, or other parts of the country. One student was even born in Africa. The students' ability to adapt to new environments and thrive academically was a tribute to their determination and resolve. Five males and three females participated in the study from all grade levels including one sophomore and one senior. All students were planning on taking AP courses at some point of their academic career. The one sophomore interviewed planned to wait until his junior year and the other students were either already in an AP course or had signed up for one in the course selection process. Of the AP classes either taken or signed up for, AP Psychology was the class with the most students at three, as well as AP Statistics. This information was critical for school officials to recognize as Black students originated from different areas and had to adapt to the culture within VEHS. Finally, Dana advised five Black students in the study, Cindy two students and Scott with one student. Each participant was able to articulate their own cultural capital and the social capital they accessed which influenced course selection.

Table 4

Study Participants Characteristics Chart

Student	Gender	Year in School	AP Courses	Birth	Counselor
Deshaun	Male	Freshman	Anticipated Junior year	Chicago	Dana
Marquis	Male	Senior	AP Statistics, Psychology	Chicago	Dana
Imani	Female	Sophomore	AP Physics	Nigeria	Scott
Darnell	Male	Junior	AP Psychology	Chicago	Cindy
Terrell	Male	Junior	AP Statistics, Psychology	Washington	Dana
Ebony	Female	Junior	Multiple AP courses	Joliet	Cindy
DeAndre	Male	Junior	AP Economics	Valdosa	Dana
Deja	Female	Sophomore	AP Environmental Science	Detroit	Dana

AP Pathway

Of the AP courses either signed up for or already taken, Black students in the study were more likely to take Social Studies courses. In all, seven students took AP courses in Social Studies, with two in Math and two in Science. None of the students were enrolled in AP English, AP Foreign Language or AP electives. Perhaps an explanation was that Social Studies courses were not subject to teacher recommendation and therefore there was open enrollment into these AP courses. A closer analysis of the eight student transcripts revealed that the students can access AP courses regardless of whether they took honors classes. Four students took honors classes freshman or sophomore year and then took AP courses either junior or senior year. Three students took regular classes freshman and sophomore year and then went into AP courses their junior or senior year. This was encouraging data that the students were not locked in regular coursework throughout their entire academic career and there were opportunities to raise their

academic levels. One example was Terrell who attended different high schools his freshman and sophomore years until he enrolled at VEHS his junior year. He signed up for two AP courses his senior year even though he had never taken an honors or AP course his first three years of high school. It was important to analyze what social capital existed within VEHS to assist the students in their efforts to take rigorous coursework.

Influence of Counselors and Teachers

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (1997) developed a social network framework that focused on the relationships between youth and institutional agents and how those relationships affect the acquisition of needed cultural capital. He believed that development of social ties to school personnel is crucial to the development of minority students. Applying these concepts to this particular research was clear. Repeatedly throughout the interviews of Black students in this study, reference was made to the role and impact of either teachers or guidance counselors influencing their decisions to pursue rigorous curriculum. These school personnel provided the needed encouragement or assistance in navigating the educational systems that impacted the student decision to take AP courses. Of the eight students in the study, six referenced the role of either their counselor or a teacher who encouraged them along their educational journey.

Deshaun is a freshman male student who only took one honors course his freshman year, Honors Biology. His 8th grade teachers had not recommended him for Honors English, Geometry, or AP Human Geography so he started out freshman year in all regular classes. However, his freshman teachers did recommend that he take Honors Chemistry, Honors English 10, and Honors Algebra 2, therefore he followed their recommendation. He was looking to take an AP course in either his junior or senior year; however he had no knowledge of taking AP tests or how to earn college credit through the testing.

Marquis is a senior male student who is in AP Statistics. He had taken Honors English classes over the years, but wanted to take AP Statistics because he wanted to go to college for nursing. His counselor, Dana, recommended AP Statistics to help prepare him for post-secondary. Earlier in the fall, Marquis and his mother came in to meet with the counselor to decide whether to drop the course since it was difficult. After a discussion in which everyone was able to share their thoughts, Dana suggested that he continue through the first semester and see if his performance could improve. In his interview for the study, he was glad he stuck with the AP Statistics class, even though it was still challenging. Dana had a direct impact on him working through his difficulties as he plans of taking the AP exam in the spring.

Darnell is a junior male student who is signed up for AP Psychology for next school year. He indicated that the reason why he is taking the AP course was because his teachers and his counselor have been telling him that he should take an AP course because the regular courses were too easy for him. He made special mention of his counselor, Cindy, who really looked out for his best interests and gave him good advice on how to prepare for college including taking Honors and AP courses. She knew his strengths and weaknesses and took them into account with her recommendations.

Terrell is a junior male who had taken regular classes all through his first three years of high school. His senior year he decided to take two AP classes, Statistics and Psychology. He credited his Pre-Calculus teacher for the idea to take AP Statistics. He had not planned on taking Calculus his senior year. She indicated that since he was not going to take Calculus his senior year he would not be prepared for Calculus in college. The Pre-Calculus class that he was in would not prepare him for the rigors of college math. She recommended AP Statistics because it would better prepare him for Calculus in college. This type of social capital relationship building between the teacher and the student was a prime example of how a teacher that took the

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time to know and listen to the plans of a student can have a positive impact on the student's academic choices. In a similar way, he described how his counselor Cindy also suggested taking AP Psychology and he agreed because it fit with his goal for his senior year to be prepared for college. Ironically, he initially tried to take an extra Physical Education class rather than a second AP course, but Cindy convinced him that would not ultimately prepare him for post-secondary. Without the influence of his counselor and his Pre-Calculus teacher he did not believe he would have signed up for two AP classes his senior year.

Ebony is a female junior who had taken AP Government and Economics and enrolled in AP Psychology for her senior year. She described that she was thankful that her counselor, Cindy, took the time to meet with her. She said since there were so many kids in the registration process Cindy could have very easily just rushed through her course selection, but she did not. Ultimately, the student wanted to be a lawyer and she felt that the AP course load would prepare her for this future career. She described her counselor as "very caring and she listens to your concerns". Ebony recounted that she had other friends say that their counselor just went through the motions and quickly signed them up for classes. These students signed up for courses and then didn't think about their courses until the next year begins. This interview also shed light on the idea that high achieving students had conversations about their course selection process and compared counselors. She said that any of her friends that had Cindy were all in agreement that she took her time to answer any questions the student might have and provide support.

Deja is a sophomore female who had signed up for AP Environmental Science and AP Psychology. She was disappointed that she had to wait until her junior or senior year to take these courses. She regretted that she only took regular U.S. History this school year and should have taken an AP U.S. History. The AP classes represented the first honors or AP courses she had taken in high school. Her counselor, Dana, had told her the first two years that she had to

take other courses before the AP classes. Now that she had earned most of her required high school credits, she can take the courses that she wants to. Dana had encouraged her that she was capable of taking AP courses and she would achieve academic success in the AP courses.

It is clear based on the Black students interviewed that the impact of a thoughtful and caring counselor can have is far reaching. It can make the difference in whether the student takes the most rigorous courses possible or not. The counselors that were referenced by the students in the study, Dana and Cindy, were also the counselors that had the more varied life experiences and a passion for helping students and this was apparent in their interviews. This carried over into their work with students in the course selection process as they took the time to connect with their students in a process that they very easily could have rushed through in order to keep up with a heavy workload. Based on anecdotal references, some of these students' friends unfortunately did not have as dynamic of an experience selecting their courses and may not have thought of taking challenging courses. The other source of encouragement came from the teachers. Whether it was the account of how the 8th grade teachers did not recommend honors courses for a student, but the freshman teachers did recommend honors courses for sophomore year, or the example of how a teacher gave specific advice to a student on what course would best prepare the student for college, teachers can either have a positive or a negative effect on whether their students access rigorous curriculum.

Peer Influence

Another theme that developed in the interviews of Black students was the important role of positive peer groups influencing them throughout their academic trajectory. Researchers had found that students whose friends had college aspirations were likely to go to college, while those who befriended students with no college-going aspirations were less likely to attend a postsecondary institution (Tierney et al., 2005). Stanton-Salazar (2001) had argued that peer

group formations played a crucial role for minority youth if rightly conceptualized and orchestrated. Black students interviewed consistently referred to their friends who were in AP classes influencing whether they signed up for AP courses. Several students specifically referred to their own experiences being in the school band and how the conversations that developed over time within this peer group influenced their decisions to take AP courses. Peers at VEHS provided the social capital to Black students to help them acquire the needed cultural capital to navigate the educational system to enroll in AP courses. Three of the Black students interviewed referred to their friends influencing their educational choices.

Perhaps the most striking example in this study of the influence peers can have on what courses students take was Deja. She beamed with pride when she recounted how she moved from Detroit to the Valdosa area in middle school and joined the band. She started playing the Sousaphone in 5th grade and continued all through high school. But the focus was less on her positive experience in band but more about the friends that she made in the band that influenced her thinking as far as taking rigorous curriculum in high school. She said "all my friends are all in the top 6% in NHS (National Honor Society) and all AP classes and I don't want to be the slowest in the group so I have been trying to push myself." So she followed the lead of her friends and signed up for AP Environmental Science which they told her was a "blow off course where you study dirt and go on field trips." AP Psychology was the other AP course she signed up for since her friends had recommended that course also. This desire to follow her high achieving friends academic track was so strong that even her mother, who was against AP courses, could not convince her to not take AP courses.

Deja's mother has been a correctional officer near the city of Valdosa for over 20 years. She deeply cares for her daughter and always told her to apply herself in school and she would do well. When it comes to her daughter signing up for classes she liked to hear what her

daughter was going to take and give her opinion. She does not want to push her into anything harder or easier. When asked about her daughter taking AP classes she responded "honestly, I lean toward they are so aggressive that the children are usually overwhelmed and not able to complete those classes." She remembered her own friends in high school that were taking "accelerated classes" were under high demands all the time and too much pressure to keep up. She did not want her daughter to experience that pressure, but ultimately her daughter did not take her advice and followed the academic path her friends were taking. Ultimately Deja relied more on the thoughts of her friends than her own mother on whether or not to take AP classes which was a testament to the positive influence peers can have on each other in the school setting.

Two other students, Imani and Ebony, in the study also referred to the influence of peers in taking advanced courses. Ebony stated "I have a few friends who are very gifted and they have already taken AP classes and you know they want to achieve." She had conversations with these friends on academic topics and when there were projects due they worked together because they tended to understand what to do. She credited the diversity in the high school which was a more diverse educational setting than the middle school she attended. Now there were multiple Black students in her honors classes that she had taken rather than being the only Black student in advanced courses in middle school. These other Black students that were interested in advanced courses and attending college were part of her network of friends that have helped shape her views on the value of taking AP courses. Imani also referred to the diversity of her high school as a source of support as she moved from the less diverse town of Palatine. She talked about how she is confident in what she wants to do in going to college and she had friends that are on the same college track that have talked to her about taking AP classes. It was from her friends where she learned about taking the actual AP test and the importance of scoring a 3 or

higher in order to earn college credit, but she did not want to overwhelm herself by taking too many AP classes so she was starting out with AP Psychology.

Black Student Cultural Capital

Black students possess unique cultural capital, and cultural habits and dispositions are passed through families (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). However, since not all families have equal economic resources, these habits and dispositions are not uniform across all cultures (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Using Critical Race Theory, Yosso shifted the focus away from the traditional White culture and highlights the culture of people of color and the cultural strengths that they possess. The interview of eight Black students at VEHS revealed the unique backgrounds and characteristics of each student. However, there were striking similarities amongst the participants in the study which provided insight into the cultural capital that these students' possessed.

Student Ownership of Course Selection

The first theme that was prevalent in the student interviews was five of the eight students indicated that taking AP courses was their idea and a choice that they made. Since the sophomore student interviewed has not taken an AP class yet, this accounts for five of seven students initiating and taking responsibility for their academic choices. Yosso (2005) used Critical Race Theory to highlight six forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital) that contributed to the concept of community cultural wealth. Students owning their educational choices was an example of utilizing the social networks that existed, either school personnel or peers, and navigating the educational system that did not have a systemic approach to encourage Black students to take the most rigorous curriculum. The students signing up for AP courses demonstrated their ability to navigate the educational system.

Deshaun was the person who made the determination that he needed to take honors courses and AP classes in the future. He decided to "bump up for next year." He indicated that he liked to talk to his mom about the courses he was going to take, but "I don't really give her an option. It's my decision on what to take." Marquis referenced how his parents wanted him to challenge himself academically, but were not specific on what that meant. It was his idea to take Honors and AP courses his senior year. He did see other students taking easy classes. He understood that he could not "slack off" his senior year if he wanted to be successful in college. Darnell also decided to take AP Psychology his senior year so he could continue to make progress and not take wasteful classes like a foods class. Terrell was very similar to Darnell by indicating these were his decisions to take AP courses. Ebony also consulted her parents, but she was the one that picked her courses. Deja was clearly influenced by her friends and their desire to take AP courses, but she was clear that no one else influenced her decision to take AP courses. As explained earlier, she did this against her mother's wishes as she took responsibility for her own educational choices.

College Aspirations

All eight students that were interviewed were interested in taking AP courses by a desire to go to college. Yosso (2005) highlighted aspirational capital as one of the six forms of capital that make up the community culture of wealth. The cultural capital of aspiring to accomplish something, in this study students' desiring to go to college. The students wanted to take an AP course so that it would look good on a college application and also to prepare themselves for the rigor of college. Each student in the study had expectations of going to college and were driven to take challenging coursework to prepare for college. Having AP coursework listed on their transcript could help them get admitted to the college of their choice.

Deshaun believes that an AP course on his transcript will look good on his college application. Marquis indicated that the AP courses made you a "more valuable asset" for the colleges. Imani stated that taking challenging courses looks good on a transcript. Darnell wanted to take an AP class for the purpose of going to college. Terrell detailed "I did take these courses basically to prepare for college." Ebony had a desire to be a lawyer and the AP courses will prepare her for college. She understands how much college costs and was hoping to get a scholarship to help cover the expense. Deandre was also planning on going to college and taking AP classes before he was finished in high school would help him achieve that goal. Deja had a relative who was a band director at the University of Mississippi. He was influential in giving scholarships and she wanted to be able to attend this university. She hoped the admission people would look at her transcripts with an AP class and that would be "pretty good."

Academic Challenge

Four of the eight students interviewed in the study were motivated because the regular courses were too easy and they wanted to challenge themselves. This concept of challenging themselves in order to accomplish the larger goal to be prepared for college was another example of aspirational capital. These students were willing to enroll in AP courses as they aspired to be the best student they could be while in high school.

Deshaun was a freshman who took all regular courses except Honors Biology. He thought that his classes were just too easy and which was why he was signing up for more honors and AP classes in the future. Imani echoed the same sentiments that the classes were just too easy and she was bored in class. School was important to her and she did not want to waste her time on courses that did not challenge her. Deja wished she would have taken AP U.S. History this school year. She reported that her current class was too easy. Deandre was a student that was on top of his academic achievement and he was looking forward to taking more college

preparatory classes rather than the regular classes. He was the type of person that liked to push

himself and that was not happening in the core, or regular, level courses.

This intrinsic desire to push themselves academically corresponded to the aspiration to be

college ready rather than be bored in classes that are beneath their capabilities. It was reassuring

that all students in the study reported that they had not endured any barriers in taking the courses

they wanted to take. Perhaps it was because these students skill level, test scores, and academic

performance warranted the teacher recommendation for AP or Honors courses, but whatever the

reason, these eight students were not precluded from taking AP courses if they so desired.

Finally, a startling discovery was that none of the students in the study were motivated to

take that AP class in order to take the AP test and perhaps earn college credit. Several students

were planning on taking the AP test, but it was almost an afterthought. This contradicted the

prevailing thought that taking an AP test, scoring a 3, 4, or 5, and earning college credit in high

school would be a prime motivator for students. One might think that this would be a motivator

for parents due to the escalating costs of college and financial constraints within society. In fact,

none of the parents that were interviewed cited the hope for their son or daughter would score

well on the AP test. Three of the students in the study did not even know specifics about taking

AP tests and the process to take the AP test. It appeared through the interviews of the Black

students in the study that taking the AP test for college credit was not a primary motivator.

Hence the importance of listening to Black students thoughts on what inspired them to take AP

courses, rather than assume what their motives were to take AP courses.

Parental Influence

It is widely acknowledged that parents can have in integral role to play in their students'

lives. The environments that the students grew up in and the cultural capital that ensued

impacted the academic decisions students make in high school. In an effort to capture the

viewpoint of the parents of students at VEHS, parents were interviewed. Five parents agreed to be interviewed and two primary themes emerged. All parents interviewed were very supportive of their students taking classes that challenged them. Secondly, parents also highlighted that it was their students' responsibility to determine what those challenging classes were.

Table 5

Parental Influence

Student	Gender	Year in School	AP Courses	Birth	Parent
Marquis	Male	Senior	Psychology	Chicago	Latonya
Imani	Female	Sophomore	AP Physics	Nigeria	Tonia
Ebony	Female	Junior	Multiple AP	Joliet	Tavaras
DeAndre	Male	Junior	AP Economics	Valdosa	Kendra
Deja	Female	Sophomore	AP Environmental Science	Detroit	Jasmine

Marquis mother, Latonya, grew up in Chicago and moved out to Valdosa with her children to find a nice house in her price range. She also valued the school district and did not want Marquis to be raised in the city. She was a single mom that has a degree from DePaul University and worked for a marketing company. She had lived in the area for about 13 years. She believed Marquis had a good education in Valdosa and the teachers have been responsive to her whenever she had a question. She had been supportive of her son taking courses to be prepared for college as they discussed what courses to take over the years. When asked about AP courses, she said Marquis was the one that wanted to take the advanced courses and she supported him, but wanted to make sure he did not take too many since he was also in sports. When Marquis was struggling in the AP course he was in she wanted to meet with the counselor,

Dana, to get her input. Everyone agreed that he would stay in the course rather than dropping it, but ultimately she wanted it to be his decision.

Kendra, Deandre's mother, grew up locally and believed that VEHS was a good school in which Deandre had educational opportunities. She always believed that he was smart and wanted him to push himself. He had not experienced any barriers to the courses he wanted to take as he wanted to challenge himself educationally throughout his schooling. She was clear that taking AP courses was his idea and it was his decision to take the rigorous courses. She would give her "blessing" to what courses he wanted to take in high school and that type of supportive relationship had worked well for them in high school. Ultimately he wanted to be a doctor someday and so she stressed with him not to be content if classes were too easy but to push himself to accomplish his goals.

Ebony's father, Dr. Tavaras, was a professor at the local community college. He sat with his daughter when they went through what classes she wanted to take in high school. However, he wanted her to present to him what classes she wanted to take and then he made sure that they were preparing her for "higher education." He also wanted to have her take classes that would prepare her for employment. He was a proponent of AP coursework since it prepared the student for the rigor of college coursework. He also believed a two parent household was important in Ebony's development as her mother stayed home with her for most of her elementary years and worked with her on school work. She was always in the gifted programming from an early age and she was considered smart.

Tonia, Imani's mom, actually came to this country from Nigeria. She recalled as she brought her daughter to America at an early age, it was a difficult adjustment but Imani was so young that it did not affect her development. Tonia remembered that Imani talked a lot and growing up they had many conversations about what her future would look like. Both of Imani's

parents were professionals in Nigeria and then America as her father was a lawyer and her mother a nurse. Tonia wanted to have high expectations for her daughter to challenge herself in school. When Imani came to her to let her know that she wanted to take AP courses she was very reassured that taking the challenging classes was the right idea.

The final parent interview was with was with Deja's mother Jasmine. Earlier in the chapter the story was told about how Deja's mother did not want her daughter to take AP courses, but she did anyway. It was important to note that Jasmine foremost wanted to support her daughter and not impose her will on her and her educational choices. She allowed her daughter to pick her educational courses and then provided her input. She was very supportive of her daughter being in the band from an early age and wanted her to continue in college. She believed that the band had put her with a group of students that cared about their education and were willing to work hard. Jasmine also had reached out to Deja's counselor Dana on several occasions if she had any questions. She had found her to be very helpful with suggestions to assist her daughter. Since Deja was an only child, it was just Jasmine and Deja, they had a very close relationship in which they discussed everything that was going on.

Even though the parents interviewed came from different backgrounds and locations the two primary themes were noteworthy. The concept that the students were responsible for the coursework that they signed up for was consistent with each parent. The parents were serving in an advisory role to their children and they provided their input into the process. All parents also portrayed that they wanted to support their children and wanted them to push themselves. They were all involved in their children's education from an early age and want them to know that they were there for them. Four of the five parents came from professional backgrounds, including one professor. As they encouraged their students to be successful in school they also had an eye on college and what career they might pursue. These strong relationships over the

years between the parent and child have formed the cultural capital that was the foundation of the

academic choices they were making in high school.

Chapter 6: Summary of Research Findings and Implications

Introduction

In this chapter I review and summarize the findings of this study of how a suburban high school that had experienced recent demographic change provided Black students access to AP courses. It will begin with a review of the problem and the purpose of the study. Then each research question will be addressed by using the theoretical framework of Social and Cultural Capital and Critical Race Theory (CRT) focusing specifically on color-blindness. The next section of this chapter will examine future considerations for potential research studies that could enhance the understanding of best practice when providing support to minority students and encourage them to take AP courses. The final section of this chapter highlights recommendations and implications for high school practice based on the findings in the study as they relate to providing access for Black students to rigorous curriculum.

Problem

The primary issue addressed in this study was that a very small percentage of Black students were accessing AP courses in high schools in Illinois. In 2014 in the state of Illinois, 54% of all White students from the graduating class of 2013 took at least one AP exam, and of those students 63% scored a 3 or more on the AP exam. In the same year, only 16.4% of Black students took an AP class, a .7% decrease from 2012, with 11.1% taking at least one AP exam. Only 4.6% of these Black students earned a score of 3 or more on the exam (College Board, 2014). At VEHS, the percentage of Black students taking an AP course was only 6.8% which was lower than the 16.4% of Black students taking an AP course throughout Illinois.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore whether Black students were accessing rigorous curriculum by taking AP courses in a predominately White suburban high

school that had undergone recent demographic change. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and

Cultural and Social Capital Frameworks, I examined the schooling environment that Black

students encountered. The factors within the school community that supported or inhibited Black

student access to AP coursework were highlighted and explored. Finally, the cultural capital in

the Black community was uncovered and how it was critical in the understanding of Black

students taking AP courses.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks were used answer the research questions in the study:

Critical Race Theory, Social Capital, and Cultural Capital. According to Solorzano (1997),

Critical Race Theory or CRT is a framework that "seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those

structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of

People of Color" (p. 6). Cultural capital refers to the habits and dispositions that facilitate a

society's cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Coleman (1988) defines

the framework of Social Capital as a social network that leads to improved behaviors and

outcomes in a system.

The marriage between CRT, Cultural and Social Capital theory made sense because these

theories provided insight into the inner workings of an educational institution. The

institutionalized structures and processes within a high school was established over time. It had

especially metastasized in the culture of the dominant White community and this culture had

racial overtones that Black students were sensitive to. At the same time, Black students had their

own Cultural Capital that was equally valuable, but may be unrecognized within the educational

system. The lens of CRT assists in the identification of racism that permeated the school and

brought these inequalities to light in order to make the school a better place for all students.

Primarily White institutions, like VEHS, were color-blind environments in which the cultural

norms of Black students were often ignored. The establishment of social networks within the

school setting assisted Black students in accessing the needed cultural capital to be successful in

school. These networks consisted of school personnel or the students within the high school who

were culturally responsive to Black students.

By engaging in qualitative research at VEHS, in order to better understand the collective

approach taken and whether the school structures and personnel were responsive enough to

support Black student access to AP courses, this study answered three fundamental research

questions.

Research Questions

1. How do the institutional structures within the high school impact Black students

   access to rigorous curriculum?

2. How does the staff within the high school build relationships with Black students to

   access rigorous curriculum?

3. How do Black students rely on their own cultural and social capital to navigate high

   school to access rigorous curriculum?

The major findings of this study were explored by answering the three research questions.

These general findings to be explored are: a color-blind high school with racial overtones, the

positive role of teachers and counselors, peer to peer support, and existing Black cultural capital.

Research question 1. The first research question of how did the institutional structures

within VEHS impact Black students access to rigorous curriculum informed the reader of what

was actually being done in the high school to facilitate Black students taking AP courses. In the

case of VEHS, CRT analysis uncovered a color-blind mind-set that existed within the

educational institution. Color-blindness was the concept of treating all students in an educational

system the same. On the surface it sounded equitable, but it can have a negative effect on

minority achievement because it did not take into consideration the unique perspectives and background of minority students. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described color-blind ideology as treatment that was the same across the board. VEHS had a color-blind approach which manifested itself in two forms. First, the administrative team and guidance counselors demonstrated a color-blind approach to their students taking AP classes. Secondly, the class registration system was based on teacher recommendation that did not allow open access for every student. The method that a student, that was not recommended by his teacher for honors or AP courses, to take the higher level course was to have two forms filled out by their parent and staff.

The school setting took on a collective belief system based on the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of the school personnel and therefore impacted the educational experience for Black students (Evans, 2007a). The color-blind approach at VEHS was evident in the interview of the District administrator and Building principal. Both emphasized the concept of having more students taking AP courses and score 3, 4, or 5's on the AP exam; however there was no identifiable strategy that encouraged Black students to increase participation levels. In fact, when I asked the question of whose responsibility it was to improve Black participation rates in AP courses, the district administrator believed it was the school personnel in the building that bore the responsibility and the building principal pushed the responsibility to the district office staff. The district administrator indicated that it was not a "racial thing" when looking to improve participation rates. He also believed that the Black student "might not be getting it at home and if they are not getting it at home, they might not be getting it at school." Through the CRT lens, this type of racial stereotype that the Black student's parents were not supportive in their students pushing themselves academically was problematic for a policy maker at the district level. The principal at VEHS also demonstrated a racial bias by indicating that Black students

"don't put that much into academics" when asked why there was such a small percentage of Black students taking AP courses. His color-blind thought process was also evident when he indicated "I don't think we treat anyone different."

Counselors have an important influence on students' motivations and expectations, especially through the provision of information regarding college preparations (Fallon, 1997; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Tierney et al., 2005). Three counselors were interviewed for the study and they all perpetuated the color-blind mind-set which permeated from the administration. Even though two of the counselors demonstrated a caring and support for their students to push themselves academically, they still followed the color-blind system of teacher recommendation and the filling out of forms for those not recommended for AP courses. The counselors offered no culturally responsive ideas to the registration process that might encourage Black students to sign up for advanced classes. Dana stated "I would like to think that African American students being no different than any other student, I don't think my approach has anything to do with their racial background." She even down played the Black student access issue by indicating that "It's a very small percentage" in reference to the number of Black students at VEHS. Cindy said "as an individual, I don't really look at skin color when dealing with them in terms of what their abilities are." Scott followed "the same process no matter the background of the student" when discussing how he registered students for classes. Within his interview, he also made the racially insensitive comments that Black parents needed to go to the AP parent night in order to be "educated" and thought that there might be "self-esteem" issues which contributed to less Black students taking advanced courses. Finally, the highly regarded AP teacher of Physics at VEHS who demonstrated genuine excitement for AP courses and collected data on increasing numbers of students taking his course had little to no thoughts on how to improve Black student participation. His goal was "to reach out universally" to all students regardless of their

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backgrounds. These interviews represented an overall color-blind mind-set at VEHS that had become institutionalized to the point that there was no evidence of divergent thinking that could challenge the norms of VEHS and provided a more culturally sensitive approach to encourage Black students to take more rigorous courses.

VEHS had an established student registration system based on teacher recommendations. The student's teacher in Math, Science, and English recommends either core, or regular level, courses or honors and AP courses for students as they registered for courses for next school year. This research did not address the subjectivity involved in the teacher determining the recommendation, but there was no evidence that there was any initiative within VEHS to have teachers purposefully recommend more minority students into higher level classes. All three counselors interviewed indicated that they followed the teacher recommendation when registering students. If a student disagreed with the teacher recommendation, two forms needed to be filled out before the student's desire was granted. The level change form, which required the signature of the parent, teacher, division chair, assistant principal, and the counselor, and the declination form where the parent and student signed off on not following the recommendation of the teacher. On the declination form it indicated "I understand that supplemental academic support may be necessary to assist my son or daughter, and take responsibility for providing or assisting with the needed resources or remediation." This statement explicitly told the parent that the school would not provide interventions and supports to those who were willing to take a chance on taking rigorous courses, they would have to make it on their own with the help of their parents. The purpose of the form, according to Cindy, was "to cover our ass" in case the student struggled. The emphasis was on protecting school personnel from criticism rather than providing a supportive environment for the students to take challenging courses.

There was one example observed where a Black student wanted to take an AP course against the teacher recommendation. This student was already enrolled in an AP course that she was recommended, but she wanted to take an additional course. The counselor, Scott, rather than presenting the forms as an option, simply stated "well I guess you want to wait and see let's just leave you down for English 3, but I'll put down to revisit." Whether this was an outlier scenario or an ongoing issue I cannot determine. But it was an example of how the teacher recommendation system and a counselor who followed the teacher recommendation prevented a student who was willing and able to take an AP class from signing up for one.

Technically VEHS had an "open enrollment" system in which in which any student can take an AP course. However, students who did not have the teacher recommendation had to fill out two forms and collect multiple signatures of staff members to accomplish their goal of enrolling in an AP course. These "hoops" according to Cindy were potential barriers to the open enrollment concept. Any one of the school personnel could refuse to sign and the student had no recourse. Interviews with the Black students in the study indicated that the students were able to sign up for AP courses without resistance since the teacher recommendation supported their rigorous course selection. They had not encountered the forms to fill out. Further research on how many of these forms were handed out to students and how many were completed and turned in would provide insight into how much of a barrier these forms were to AP participation, but by its mere existence it implies that not all students are openly invited to take AP courses.

Research question 2. The second guiding research question is how does the staff within the high school build relationships with Black students to access rigorous curriculum? A main focus of the interviews of the Black students and parents was to see if the guidance counselors and teachers developed positive relationships with students and supported them in their endeavor to take AP courses. Of the three counselors in the study, there was evidence that both Dana and

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Cindy were able to provide the needed social capital for the students in the study to pursue challenging coursework. Teachers were also mentioned in the student interviews as having an impact on their academic decision making.

These school personnel provided the needed encouragement or assistance in navigating the educational systems that impacted the student decision to take AP courses. Of the eight students in the study, six students referenced the role of either their counselor or a teacher who encouraged them along their educational journey. Deshaun's freshman teachers recommended that he take Honors Chemistry, Honors English 10, and Honors Algebra 2, and he followed their recommendation. This was a change for him since his 8th grade teachers had recommended core level classes his freshman year with the exception of Honors Biology. Therefore his teachers saw the potential that he had and recommended he push himself academically. Another example of the positive role that a teacher played in a student's educational planning was with Terrell. Terrell was a junior male who had taken regular classes all through his first three years of high school. His senior year he decided to take two AP classes, Statistics and Psychology. He credited his Pre-Calculus teacher for the idea to take AP Statistics. He had not planned on taking Calculus his senior year. She indicated that since he was not going to take Calculus his senior year he would not be prepared for Calculus in college. The Pre-Calculus class that he was in would not prepare him for the rigors of college math. She recommended AP Statistics because it would better prepare him for Calculus in college. This type of social capital relationship building between the teacher and the student demonstrated how a teacher that took the time to know and listen to the plans of a student can have a positive impact on the student's academic choices.

Marquis' counselor, Dana, recommended AP Statistics to help prepare him for post-secondary.   Earlier in the fall, Marquis and his mother came in to meet with the counselor to

decide whether to drop the course since it was difficult. I was fortunate enough to sit in the meeting. Dana suggested that he continue through the first semester and see if his performance could improve. His performance in the class did improve as he and his mother listened to the advice of his counselor. Dana had a direct impact on him working through his difficulties as he planned on taking the AP exam in the spring. Deja also had Dana as a counselor. Dana had told her the first two years that she had to take other courses before the AP classes. Now that she had earned many required credits, she signed up for the courses that she wanted to including AP courses. Dana provided the needed support to Deja to register for the rigorous courses.

Cindy was the other counselor who was mentioned by the Black students as providing needed support in their academic endeavors. Darnell made special mention of Cindy who really looked out for his best interests and gave him good advice on how to prepare for college including taking Honors and AP courses. She knew his strengths and weaknesses and took them into account with her recommendations. Terrell described how his counselor Cindy also suggested taking AP Psychology and he agreed because it fit with his goal for his senior year to be prepared for college. Ironically, he initially tried to take an extra Physical Education class rather than a second AP course, but Cindy convinced him that would not ultimately prepare him for post-secondary. Without the influence of his counselor, he did not believe he would have signed up for two AP classes his senior year. Ebony described her counselor as "very caring and she listens to your concerns." Ebony recounted that she has had other friends say that their counselor just went through the motions and quickly signed them up for classes, but not Cindy.

Based on this research, a supportive guidance counselor or teacher can influence a student to take a challenging course. Not every student had the requisite cultural capital to immediately thrive in an academic environment in which AP courses were the norm. The counselor or teacher can provide the social capital to assist the Black student in his or her

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acquisition of the necessary cultural capital to enroll in AP courses, and to be successful in those courses. Which leads to the discussion on what cultural capital the Black student possessed coming into high school.

Research question 3. The third research question of this study is how do Black students rely on their own cultural and social capital to navigate high school to access rigorous curriculum? An important finding that emerged from the study was that peer to peer interaction at VEHS provided the social capital to Black students to help them acquire the needed cultural capital to navigate the educational system to enroll in AP courses. Three of the Black students interviewed referred to their friends influencing their educational choices.

Deja, who participated in the band, said "all my friends are all in the top 6% in NHS (National Honor Society) and all AP classes and I don't want to be the slowest in the group so I have been trying to push myself." This desire to follow her high achieving friends' academic track was so strong that even her mother, who was very much against AP courses, could not convince her to not take AP courses. Two other students, Imani and Ebony, in the study also referred to the influence of peers in taking advanced courses. Ebony stated "I have a few friends who are very gifted and they have already taken AP classes and you know they want to achieve." She had conversations with these friends on academic topics and when there were projects due they worked together because they tended to understand what to do. Imani talked about how she was confident that she wanted to go to college and she had friends that were on the same college track. They had discussions about her taking AP classes. It was from her friends where she learned about taking the actual AP test and the importance of scoring a 3 or higher in order to earn college credit, but she did not want to overwhelm herself by taking too many AP classes so she was starting out with AP Psychology. These types of interactions heavily influenced the decisions of Black students as they searched for how to be successful post-secondary. However,

a supportive home environment can also be a critical factor in whether a Black student challenged himself or herself academically.

Black students also relied on the cultural capital they possessed separate from the engrained cultural and social capital in the educational institution. Yosso's (2005) Community of Cultural Wealth established the rich cultural traditions that existed within the minority community. She highlighted six forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital) that contribute to the concept of community wealth. Two of these forms of cultural capital, aspirational and navigational, existed within the Black students in the study as they pursued enrolling in challenging coursework. Aspirational capital accentuated the pursuit of hopes and dreams regardless of the obstacles that existed. The concept was for people to overcome their current circumstances and aim for a brighter future. In this study, the students aimed for going to college and the AP courses would strengthen their transcripts and applications. The AP courses would also prepare them for the rigor of college courses so that they would be prepared to make the transition to college.

Each student in the study had expectations of going to college and were driven to take challenging coursework to prepare for college. Deshaun believed that an AP course on his transcript would look good on his college application. Marquis indicated that the AP courses made you a "more valuable asset" for the colleges. Imani stated that taking challenging courses looked good on a transcript. Darnell wanted to take an AP class for the purpose of going to college. Terrell detailed "I did take these courses basically to prepare for college." Ebony had a desire to be a lawyer and the AP courses will prepare her. She understood how much college cost and was hoping to get a scholarship to help cover the expense. Deandre was also planning on going to college and taking AP classes before he was finished in high school would help him achieve that goal. Deja had a relative who was a band director at the University of Mississippi.

He was influential in giving scholarships and she wanted to be able to attend this university. She hoped the admission people would look at her transcripts and see an AP class and that should be "pretty good." Ultimately these students were willing to do extensive homework, writing, and studied for difficult assessments in AP courses in order to better themselves.

Another example of aspirational capital was four of the eight students in the study were motivated because the regular courses were too easy and they wanted to challenge themselves. These students were willing to enroll in AP courses as they aspired to be the best student they could be while in high school. Deshaun, a freshman taking all regular courses except Honors Biology, thought that his classes were just too easy and was signing up for more honors and AP classes in the future. Imani echoed that same sentiments that the classes were just too easy and she was bored in class. School was important to her and she did not want to waste her time on courses that did not challenge her. Deja wished she would have taken AP U.S. History this past school year. She reported that her current class was too easy. Deandre was a student that was on top of his academic achievement and he was looking forward to taking more college preparatory classes rather than the regular classes. He was the type of person that liked to push himself and that was not happening in the core level courses. The desire to aspire to be the best student possible motivated these students to take AP courses rather than be content with easy classes in which high grades were the norm.

Five of the eight students indicated that taking AP courses was their idea and a choice that they made. This implied that the students possessed the navigational capital to become aware of and pursue enrolling in AP courses. This ability to maneuver within the educational system and own the decision making process in taking advanced coursework was admirable. Deshaun was the person that made the determination that he needed to take honors courses and AP classes in the future. He decided to "bump up for next year." He indicated that he liked to

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talk to his mom about the courses he was going to take, but "I don't really give her an option. It's my decision on what to take." Marquis referenced how his parents wanted him to challenge himself academically, but were not specific on what that meant. It was his idea to take Honors and AP courses his senior year. He saw other students taking easy classes. He understood that he could not "slack off" his senior year if he wanted to be successful in college. Darnell also decided to take AP Psychology his senior year so he continued to make progress and did not take wasteful classes like foods class. Terrell was very similar to Darnell by indicating these were his decisions to take AP courses. Ebony also consulted her parents, but she was the one that picked her courses. Deja was clearly influenced by her friends and their desire to take AP courses, but she was clear that no one else influenced her decision to take AP courses. As explained earlier, she did this against her mother's wishes as she took responsibility for her own educational choices. Students without the necessary navigational capital may not be able to sign up for AP courses because they have not put themselves in a position to earn a teacher recommendation for AP coursework or advocate for themselves in the enrollment process.

Since the research questions have been answered in this study, it was essential to examine what areas of continued research would complement this study and further the understanding of how to improve Black student access to AP coursework.

Recommendations for Future Considerations

Role of the parent. Solorzano (1992) uncovered a gap that exists between families of color and White families with regard to college aspirations and actual attainment. Even though most parents of color want their children to go to college, their students often times do not attend four year higher education institutions. All parents in this study supported their children in their endeavor to aspire to go to college and achieve academic success. Marquis mother, Latonya, had been supportive of her son taking courses to be prepared for college as they discussed what

courses to take over the years. When asked about AP courses, she said Marquis was the one that wanted to take the advanced courses and she supported him, but wanted to make sure he did not take too many since he was also in sports. Kendra, Deandre's mother, would give her "blessing" to what courses he wanted to take in high school and that type of supportive relationship has worked well for them in high school. Ultimately, he wanted to be a doctor and so she stressed with him not to be content if classes were too easy but to push himself to accomplish his goals. Ebony's father, Dr. Tavaras, was a professor at the local community college. He sat with his daughter when they went through what classes she wanted to take in high school. However, he wanted her to present to him what classes she desired to take and then he made sure that they were preparing her for "higher education." He also wanted her to take classes that would prepare her for employment. He desired to provide a reassuring environment in which she could exchange ideas at home with someone that was familiar with educational systems. Jasmine, Deja's mother, wanted to support her daughter and not impose her will on her and her educational choices. She allowed her daughter to pick her educational courses and then provided her input. She was very understanding of her daughter being in the band from an early age and wanted her to continue in college.

The role of the parent in providing the foundation and support in their upbringing was a potential area of research that should be explored. According to The United States Department of Education (2015), one of the three essentials to having a safe and supportive climate was to have a supportive environment within the school. Ideally it was a positive environment where students were willing to take chances and know that there are those that will support them. How much more important was the home environment a Black student grew up in the first 14 to 15 years of their life to set the foundation for the academic success they can have in high school? The students in this study benefited from a home environment that not only taught them how to

aspire to go to college, but be a resource along their student's high school journey. Further

research would involve interviewing more Black families and what cultural capital their children

acquired during their formative years which led to their children achieving academic success in

high school and college.

Teacher recommendation. Another area of future research would be the impact of

teacher recommendation and the impact of forms like the parent consent and the teacher

recommendation forms. It would be interesting to look at other suburban high schools that have

teacher recommendation processes and the use of mandatory forms to over-ride the teacher

recommendation to take an advanced class. There was research on how teacher recommendation

can limit minority student access to advanced coursework. Yonezawa and Jones (2006) collected

student data from 12 schools from 2000 to 2002. They found that most students thought that the

process for students to select their classes was inequitable. They did not have faith in the teacher

recommendation process or that the teachers were acting in the best interest of the students.

Another example was a study of 297 mathematics and English classes in low-track Math and

English classes, low-income minority students were exposed to less rigorous course content, and

were generally not expected to learn the types of skills required to succeed in college (Oakes,

1985). Further research at Valdosa East High School would include analysis of all teacher

recommendations by student demographics to see whether the color-blind school educational

system was limiting opportunities for Black students. This data could be compared to other more

culturally responsive high schools to see if those schools provided more access to Black students.

It would also be beneficial to track how many students at VEHS that were issued the required

forms to take an advanced course against a teacher recommendation actually got the forms filled

out and signed up for the course. To take it further it would also be enlightening what grades the

student earned in the advanced course.

Tracking. Another potential area of research was in the area of tracking. Tracking was the process of sorting students by academic ability into certain groups. This can be a particularly destructive practice in schools where minority students tended to be grouped into lower tracks with low expectations and performance. In the interview with Cindy, a counselor at VEHS, she explained how students were tracked early on in elementary school because of their score on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. Cindy claimed that the system did not look at the work ethic of the students in elementary school and rather focused on these scores to place students in certain tracks. This happened as early as second grade and unfortunately students that worked hard and got good grades may not access the most rigorous curriculum, since the decisions were based on a standardized test. The effect was multiplied over the years as students miss out on being challenged over their formative years. This could be a point of further research to analyze the demographic breakdown of tracking practices in elementary and middle school and how it impacted Black student access to AP courses in high school.

Implications for Practice

Equity reform. There is limited research to date that has focused on how suburban school district leaders have responded to the demographic shifts occurring within their schools (Holme et al., 2013). A few studies have started to highlight the importance of school leadership in a suburban school district that is becoming more racially diverse. Holme et al. discovered that administrators focused on the various technical responses to the increasing diversity in their district. Examples of the responses included changing structures within the schools by hiring instructional specialists and academic deans to support teachers. Staff development included training staff on differentiated instruction and administrators learned how to analyze data and disaggregate the data and track assessment student performance. While these efforts were needed, the effectiveness of these initiatives was jeopardized by a lack of attention to normative

and political issues within the district. With that in mind, a movement is developing in Illinois and throughout the country in which school districts are taking a close look at how inclusive their environments are by first looking at themselves and understanding the strength of diversity. The process begins with an impartial needs assessment of the district by having an organization conduct interviews and focus groups of school personnel and students by race to see how the school district is serving all students and meeting the needs of all staff. An example would be Bea Young and Associates out of Chicago Illinois who conducts "cultural audits" of the school district to identify strengths and barriers to having an inclusive educational environment (Bea Young Associates, LLC, 2017). Once it is established that there is work to be done having either Bea Young or another outside entity come in and start to work with staff and students on their own belief systems and racial attitudes.

This is very challenging work to embark on from a school administrative standpoint; however, implementation of initiatives to improve student growth and provide educational opportunity for all and ignore the equity needs would not lead to the necessary change. Another example of outside support is Gary Howard and associates who come to a school and work with the staff on greater equity and social justice. He also recommends equity teams develop within the school as well as student teams to be the internal supports to staff and students as they embark on their own equity journey. This is more than a conference or workshop, it is ongoing work that takes years and the reality is the work is never finished. Eventually the topic of culturally responsive teaching is addressed, but not until a more equitable foundation is established (Gheequity Institute, 2017). Gary Howard is involved in other school districts throughout the country, but he has also begun assisting suburban school districts in Northern Illinois. Certainly Valdosa School District 100 would benefit from this type of equity programming.

Equitable hiring practices. According to the school report card for Valdosa School District 100, currently 92% of VEHS teachers and administrators were White, with 4.6% Hispanic and only 1% Black. One percent Black teachers and administrators was significantly lower than the 8% Black students who attend VEHS. A closer look identified that there are no minority administrators or counselors at VEHS. This would be an ideal place to start with improving minority hiring practices. Especially since the school administration leads any equitable reform initiatives and the counselors served as agents of support for students. Taking a closer look at applicants by race and giving minority candidates a chance to interview for all open positions would be a good place to start. To take this initiative further there are diversity job fairs that school districts can attend to create a more inclusive staff.

Finding a job fair with an emphasis on diverse applicants in Illinois can be challenging, so school officials may have to leave the state to find job fairs like the Boston Diversity Career Fair for Educators. Another option would be to hire a company like NEMNET, a national diversity recruitment and consulting firm, to help expose the school district to qualified minority candidates. While these efforts may involve resources and time, the effect of hiring a few key minority employees can have a long lasting impact on creating a more diverse and inclusive environment. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) highlighted the work of European American and African American principals in schools in which student demographics are changing. The European leaders used a more color blind approach and missed opportunities to address the racial overtones within their schools. The African American principals used a more color conscious approach by addressing these racial issues as they arose. The "leaders must create trust, establish teams that dispel stereotypical roles for students of color, and promote dialogue of pedagogical differences in responding to the learning needs of students of color" (p. 95). This was further

evidence that hiring minority administrators can lead to more attention of issues of equity and provide a voice for those that do not feel like they have one.

Peer mentor groups. As outlined earlier, three of the Black students interviewed referred to their friends influencing their educational choices. Researchers have also found that students whose friends have college aspirations were more likely to go to college, while those who befriended students with no college aspirations were less likely to attend a postsecondary institution (Tierney et al., 2005). In this study, the students reported that their friends taking AP courses influenced their desire to pursue the advanced courses also. Stanton-Salazar (2001) had argued that peer group formations play a crucial role for minority youth if rightly conceptualized and orchestrated. Unfortunately, minority youth may perceive peer groups in a way that inhibited college aspirations. As a result, the benefits that peer groups offered may not be realized by minority students. With this in mind, groups are made in guidance offices in high schools across the country. The emphasis tends to be in the realm of social emotional groups for students suffering from grief or emotional issues; however, peer groups of similar students talking about the issues they deal with are on the rise.

The American School Counselor Association, or ASCA, has a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) which involves a data driven approach to comprehensive counseling. The application process is difficult and involves heavy data collection of guidance programming. 650 schools across the United States (41 in Illinois) have received this honor to date. One of the hallmarks of the ASCA model is groups. The type of group that could have an impact on Black student participation in more rigorous courses at a school like VEHS would be a high achieving group for Black students. As the study showed, there were very accomplished Black students taking AP courses at VEHS; however, the number of students was very low. The group would match the high achieving Black students with any Black student that might be interested. These

groups could meet and have the type of academic discussions about the importance of AP

courses or how to fill out a college application. Ideally freshmen or sophomore Black students

would learn from juniors or seniors who learned how to navigate the system and succeed. These

groups would provide the forum for the needed academic discussions for students who may not

possess the cultural capital to move ahead academically. The peers provided the social capital

needed to increase access for Black students to AP coursework.

Appreciation of Black cultural capital. The final recommendation for administrators

that can encourage Black student participation in AP coursework would be to celebrate the Black

cultural capital in existence. While this can change from community to community, a good place

to start would be Yosso's (2005) work on Community Cultural Capital. Yosso used CRT to

highlight six forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant

capital) that contributed to the concept of community cultural wealth. Communities of color

have cultural beliefs and assets to offer that should be incorporated into the collective values of

the school. The study of VEHS highlighted the existence of aspirational and navigational capital

which enabled Black students to traverse the color-blind educational system. However, if the

educational environment could embrace these forms of cultural capital and incorporate these

concepts into instruction in the classroom.

An example of what could be done in the educational setting is emphasizing familial

capital. Familial capital represents the cultural beliefs that represent a community history and a

broader sense of family other than immediate family. Within the Black community a strong

bond exists amongst themselves that helps them come together. This fits in with the concept of

forming groups of Black students that can come together and discuss what they are experiencing

and what kind of supports may be available. Storytelling is a theme in CRT that fits well with

this concept of familial capital. Storytelling is a method in which minority students are able to

tell stories about their experiences with racial subjection and how they must contend with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While there was no evidence that this type of dialogue existed or was encouraged at VEHS, these types of open discussions within classrooms could lead to a more culturally sensitive environment. In a suburban high school like VEHS, the encouragement of open dialogue about what Black students are experiencing can ultimately lead to a more inclusive setting where Black students feel comfortable taking a chance and enrolling in an AP course.

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Appendix A: Valdosa East High School
Level Change Form

Date: _____   Current Grade: 9 ☐   10 ☐   11 ☐   12 ☐

Student Name: _____   Counselor: _____

Parent Name: _____   Phone Number: _____

1. Previous academic history in this department (course/grade/teacher)

	Course	**Grade**	**Teacher**
8th	_____	_____	_____
9th	_____	_____	_____
10th	_____	_____	_____
11th	_____	_____	_____
12th	_____	_____	_____

2. Test Scores   **Recent Test**   **Percentile**

Reading	_____	_____
Language Arts	_____	_____
Mathematics	_____	_____

Placement Recommendation for:

School year: _____ Semester: _____ Class: (indicate level) _____

Semester: _____ Class: _____

Level Change Request: Date: _____

From: _____   To: _____

Student Signature:	_____	Date: _____
Parent Signature:	_____	Date: _____
Teacher Signature:	_____	Date: _____
Divisional Chair:	_____	Date: _____
Assistant Principal:	_____	Date: _____
Counselor Signature:	_____	Date: _____

Appendix B: Valdosa East High School
Declination Form

Date: _____

Student's Name:_____ ID Number: _____

Counselor:_____ 15-16
Grade: 08 _____09 10 11 _____ 12

Your child's teachers have made placement recommendations for your student 2015-2016 courses. In the scheduling process, your student requested a change to this recommendation. See below:

Teacher recommended course for next year: _____
                                                                        (course)

Your student's requested course for next year: _____
                                                                          (course)

Parent/Student Agreement:

- I/we understand that the teacher and department chair do not endorse placement in the requested course based on my child's academic performance predictors and current achievement. I/we understand that supplemental academic support may be necessary to assist my son/daughter, and take responsibility for providing or assisting with the needed resources or remediation.

- If my/our child's work in this course is not satisfactory, I/we will support and take responsibility for recommended remedial measures.

- Students moving to a new level after the start of the school year without departmental endorsement are responsible for learning any material previously covered by students at the new level.

- I/we also understand that my child will remain in this course and level until the end of the semester/year.

If you or your student has questions about this placement, please contact the Department Chair or your student's counselor.

Read the above statements and recommendations. Please sign, indicating your receipt of this recommendation and verifying your desire to have your student remain in the class they selected. Return the signed form to the care of your counselor in Student Services.

Student Signature _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature _____ Date:_____