ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS THROUGH THE INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF A DETRACKING PROGRAM

Catherine J. Sutton, Doctorate of Education, 2023

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Christine Neumerski, College of Education

The American education system has consistently produced disparate outcomes for Black students in terms of graduation rates and college readiness. A deep exploration of this problem reveals that Black students are oftentimes placed in less rigorous courses with less qualified educators who lack the skills to manage student behavior and provide high-quality instruction. A possible solution to this problem is the elimination of tracking, an approach to sorting students by ability levels that more often sorts students by privilege and social status. However, the removal of tracks (i.e., detracking) is a controversial change as it disrupts both teachers' and the community's deep-rooted idea of "what school should look like." Teachers, who are on the front lines of detracking, must feel supported and heard when this initiative is in its initial implementation phase. More importantly, they must have a shared commitment, along with school leaders, to the program's success.

This qualitative study, which was done through individual teacher interviews, a review of training materials, and a focus group compiled of those interviewed to discuss initial findings, explores teacher perceptions of how they were prepared, engaged, and supported by school and system leaders during a detracking initiative that took place in three different high schools in one school district. The findings of this study will help educational leaders understand the

complexities of this initiative and the planning and support needed to make it sustainable. Such themes that were discovered include the need for a pre-established collaborative culture and regular time for teacher collaboration. Most importantly though, this study reveals a larger issue with today's educational practices. In a society that is rapidly changing, detracking should be considered an important re-structuring of our traditional school practices that better aligns with equity and the needs of today's learners, rather than just another initiative.

ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS THROUGH THE INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF A DETRACKING PROGRAM

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Preface

A particular passion of mine is the search for equity in education. Before I became a teacher, I was blind to the privilege I was afforded during my primary and secondary public-school education as a middle-class White female. Thanks to excellent mentors and a rich post-undergraduate education, a fire was lit inside of me to explore how we reshape our schools so that more students, especially those who have been systemically underserved, find boundless success. I do believe that education, when provided equitably, can serve as a societal equalizer. Sadly, the American education system is not there just yet. But the more we explore and question our long-standing school traditions and structures, the better chance we can make this the reality. I challenge you to question that which you have accepted as normal, acceptable, or unchangeable in the education system more often.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor, role model, and best friend: Joe Sutton.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AP	Advanced Placement
BHS	Beckett High School
CCPS	Cooper County Public Schools
CCR	College and Career Readiness
CHS	Cooper High School
CogAT	Cognitive Abilities Test
CSA	Causal System Analysis
CTE	Career and Technical Education
ED	Economically Disadvantaged
EL	English Learner
ELA	English Language Arts
EOS	Equal Opportunity Schools
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
IB	International Baccalaureate
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
ILT	Instructional Leadership Team
MCCR Standards	Maryland College and Career Ready Standards
MHS	Mason High School
MSDE	Maryland State Department of Education
NIRN	National Implementation Research Network
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
PD	Professional Development
SDI	Specially Designed Instruction

Section 1: Introduction

The United States educational system has a long history of underachievement and low expectations among Black children. When addressing this inequality, it is essential to trace America's dark history to the use of Blacks as slaves, which began in the 16th century and continued until the late 19th century. For hundreds of years, White Americans were afforded legal, political, and educational dominance over Black slaves, and this legacy is deeply ingrained in the psyche of our American culture. Slaves, forbidden to learn basic literacy, were systemically oppressed through a lack of education (Alexander, 2010). Even after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the overt racism of White Americans, poverty, and low literacy levels of Black parents continued to suppress Black children and limit access to quality education (Collins & Margo, 2003). Black students were educated in a "separate but equal" setting, which severely lacked equity of resources. Washington (1904), when speaking on the grossly disparate educational opportunities for Blacks that continued to place them in a subordinate position to Whites, stated, "It is not possible to improve the condition of any race until its mind is awakened and strengthened" (p. 1).

Although American schools were officially desegregated in 1954 following *Brown v. Board of Education*, education inequalities among Black and White students did not fade (Coleman et al., 1966). Over 50 years ago, Coleman et al.'s (1966) *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report exposed deep educational inequities between White and Black students, even in heterogeneous schools. The report revealed stark disparities in educational resources and outcomes between Black and White students in schools

throughout the nation. For example, at the time of the study, the average Black 12th grader in the rural south performed similarly to a White 7th grader in the urban northeast.

In American society, education had always been held up as the "great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery" (Mann, 1848), but Coleman's research asserted that this was not the case. Although Coleman et al.'s (1966) findings eventually led to a number of initiatives intended to bring more resources to historically segregated schools and led to support for Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was intended to level the playing field between poor and predominantly minority students in schools, the opportunity and outcome gaps continued. Darling-Hammond (1998) believed that educational inequality continued to persist because minority students continued without the experience of smaller schools, smaller class sizes, rigorous curricula, and highly qualified teachers—four factors that greatly influenced heightened student achievement. While there have been some improvements in educational outcomes, such as high school graduation rates, these have been only modest, and achievement gaps persist, many of which will be discussed later in this section. According to Hanushek (2016), if the gaps continue to close at the same rate, it will take close to 250 years to close the Black–White gap in math achievement and 150 years to close the reading gap.

Complicating this issue is what Tyack and Tobin (1994) refer to as the "grammar of schooling": the long-established institutional structure of schooling, which is slow to change and often poses challenges to innovation. According to Hubbard and Datnow (2020), "These enduring features of school organization have helped to hold in place traditional, teacher-led instruction, desks in rows, and typical A–F grading scales in many

US secondary schools. Thus, although we can point to beacons of innovation, by and large, secondary schools look much the same as they did years ago, except that the demands for student performance have intensified" (p. 500). Teachers often enjoy the grammar of schooling because it allows them to perform in a predictable fashion each day and comfortably cope with what is expected of them from parents and school leadership: "controlling student behavior, instructing heterogeneous pupils and sorting people for future roles in school and later life" (Tyack & Cuban 1995, p. 86).

Therefore, whenever policymakers or other reformers consider a change in the grammar of schooling, it is critical to understand how teachers engage in and support the change effort, as they play a critical role in its success or failure (Datnow, 2020). Datnow (2020) states that "not only are teachers active agents in reform, but their actions influence actions and interactions at the school, district, and societal levels" (p. 435). She emphasizes that during a school-wide reform effort, it is critical to consider the power structures among the teaching staff and the role of teachers during the planning and implementation phases of school change. If educational leaders can see reform as a *co-constructed process* among leaders and teachers, the reform is more likely to find success.

Further, Hynds (2010) cautions that reforms created under a social justice lens, such as structural changes (e.g., detracking), often meet resistance from teachers, as these equity-minded reforms often fail to establish a shared vision among leaders and teachers. This dissertation focuses on the initial implementation of a detracking initiative in three high schools in one school district through the lens of the teachers who were involved in the change initiative. The specific purpose of this dissertation is to explore the degree to

which teachers involved in the initial implementation in three high schools in one school district experienced the initial implementation and felt engaged and supported during the process of changing traditional and long-existing course structures.

Background

A contributing factor to inequitable outcomes is Black high school students' lack of access to academically rigorous coursework (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Currently, American high schools continue to be segregated by race in terms of enrollment in advanced coursework, which, according to Morgan et al. (2018), includes career and technical education, advanced placement, concurrent enrollment in college credit-bearing courses, and honors. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) note that secondary-level Black students are assigned to advanced classes at much lower rates than their White peers. As an example, nationally, White students are 1.8 times more likely than Black students to take AP classes (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). In Maryland, White students are 2.3 times more likely to take AP classes than Black students (Groeger et al., 2018). Although it is easier to access national data on AP enrollment, my research will focus on honors access for Black students because, in the school system used for this study, honors-level courses are a prerequisite, and therefore a gateway, to AP courses. For this study, honors is defined as courses that offer a more rigorous, faster-paced curriculum and examines content at a deeper level than an academic-level classroom. Morgan et al. (2018) found that student enrollment in rigorous secondary curricula, such as honors, leads to increased college enrollment, persistence, and graduation, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Increasing Black students' access to honors courses has the potential to counteract long-standing structural inequities in education.

According to Reardon et al. (2019), many schools in the United States currently function under a de facto form of segregation through the academic tracking of students into courses with varying rigor. While supposedly used to group students by ability, according to Potter (2019):

> Academic tracking and other forms of homogeneous ability grouping such as gifted programs frequently do a poor job at the main goal they are designed to achieve: sorting students by ability. Research suggests that, aside from their academic preparedness and ability, students' degree of privilege—in the form of families' resources, access to test prep, and social capital, as well as the implicit biases of staff and teachers—may come into play. (p. 1)

Reardon et al. (2019) argue that the denial of access to rigorous academic coursework contributes to the achievement gaps between Black and White students and begins with the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and talented programs in elementary school and continues into middle school with a lack of access to Algebra I and other advanced coursework. Patrick et al. (2020) report that by the time Black students enter high school, they too often lack the skills to gain access to advanced courses or programs, which eventually leads to weakened college and career opportunities.

Tracking and Ability Grouping

Tracking is the term given to what is sometimes called ability grouping. According to Hallinan (2004), tracking in the American education system originated in the early 20th century as an effort to educate an influx of immigrant students and gained momentum with the onset of IQ and standardized testing, providing a scientific means to sort students by ability. During the 20th century, tracking was used to groom students for

either college or a vocational trade. With the onset of "College and Career Readiness" standards for all students, this extreme form of tracking has diminished, but students continue to be placed in courses based on their perceived ability levels and past performance, and the growth and creation of such national movements as AP is an "example of how tracking has become an institutionalized practice" (p. 72).

Since tracking or ability grouping has been criticized by a number of researchers, it is troubling that Black students are more frequently placed in lower tracks than their White peers. Futrell and Gomez (2008) argue that tracking "contributes to the poor academic performance of low-income and minority students, maintaining barriers that deny these students an equal opportunity to reach high standards" (p. 74). Furthermore, Rubin (2006) asserts that, although originally created to provide students with more tailored education experiences based on their ability levels, "the negative impact of tracking on students who are grouped low is clear from a variety of empirical studies over decades" (p. 5). Oakes (2005) categorizes the three most negatively impactful areas for low-tracked students as *student access to knowledge*, *classroom instructional opportunities*, and *classroom learning environments*. In the area of *student access to knowledge*, Oakes (2005) asserts that students in low-tracked classes do not encounter the "high-status knowledge" required for college; instead, they are mostly exposed to learning tasks that require memorization or low-level comprehension. For *opportunities to learn*, Oakes (2005) shares that low-tracked students are generally exposed to less enthusiastic teachers and less varied and organized learning tasks than higher-tracked students. Lastly, in terms of *classroom climate*, Oakes (2005) found that teachers in low-track classes are often perceived as less concerned with students and more focused on

punitive measures, spending more time on discipline and behavior than on instruction. For that reason, students have a reduced amount of trust in their teacher, while the teacher spends more energy maintaining control, making learning less likely to occur. Oakes (2005) believes that:

> these differences in learning opportunities portray a fundamental irony of schooling: those students who need more time to learn appear to be getting less; those students who have the most difficulty learning are being exposed least to the sort of teaching that best facilitates learning. (p. 8)

For these reasons, it is critical that schools consider a detracked approach to instruction that improves learning for all students, especially Black students, who have historically received reduced academic opportunities. Detracking courses refers to the removal of differentiated curricula and the inclusion of all students within a homogenous learning environment where teachers use instructional approaches that acknowledge and serve a variety of incoming knowledge and ability (Oakes, 2005). Alvarez and Mehan (2006) found that detracking can propel students from low-income households toward increased college eligibility and enrollment. The positive impacts also extend to increasing achievement of low-, middle-, and high-achieving students. Rui (2009) indicates that detracked programs ultimately benefit students rather than harm students.

However, Mehta and Cohen (2017) caution that reforms, such as detracking, which are often embraced by reformers, struggle to find traction in a school because they do not address the broad needs that exist in public schools and do not garner much support from educators and external groups. When considering change of this magnitude, school leaders must view educational reform as a “co-constructed process and as a

dynamic relationship between structure, culture, and agency that was helpful in making sense of the complex complexities of school improvement" (Datnow, 2020, p. 435). Unfortunately, according to Burner (2018), school reform efforts often ignore the need for a shared vision and collaborative environments in which teachers engage and learn alongside school leaders. When this happens, teachers often feel that the reform is happening to them (*dissemination*) rather than with them (*transformation*), which can lead to the reform's failure (Burner, 2018).

Problem Statement

In Cooper County Public Schools (CCPS),[1] the tracking of Black students is evident. Black students are underrepresented in enrollment in rigorous coursework, specifically at the high school level. CCPS is a mid-sized school system in Maryland. In 2019, CCPS enrolled 15,936 students in grades K–12. Black students represented 12.8% of the enrollment across grades K–12. However, Black students accounted for only 5.6% of the gifted/talented program population and 9.3% of AP enrollment (CCPS does not offer IB programs).

There are four high schools in the school system, and all of them offer honors, AP, and dual enrollment (college credit-bearing courses in cooperation with a local community college) opportunities. Cooper High School (CHS)[2] is one of four high schools in the CCPS. In 2020–2021, 1,134 students were enrolled in grades 9–12. CHS is the most diverse high school in the school system. About a fifth (19.5%) of the students were identified as Black; 61.5% were identified as White; 7.8% were identified as

[1] The name of the school district has been changed to a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of staff and students.
[2] The name of the school building has been changed to a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of staff and students.

Hispanic; and 8.4% were identified as multiracial. In addition, 19.2% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged (ED), and Black students accounted for 40.4% of the ED group. About 3% of students were identified as English language learners, and 18.1% had either a 504 plan or an Individual Education Program (IEP); Black students disproportionally accounted for 45.8% of student receiving Special Education services.

According to Civil Rights Data Collection (2017), Black students at CHS accounted for 13.9% of AP course enrollment although they represented 19.5% of the school's population. Further, the data indicated that White students at CHS were 1.7 times more likely to take at least one AP course than their Black classmates. Although data on AP and dual enrollment are more readily available on a state and national level, the focus on access to honors courses is not as well documented. In CCPS, high school courses are designated as academic and honors. Courses designated as honors serve as the "gatekeeper" to AP and dual enrollment. However, honors enrollment data vary across high schools in CCPS because each school has the autonomy to determine honors enrollment criteria and master scheduling. The content of these courses can also vary.

For example, according to the CCPS Reading/Language Arts website (2023), there is no stated curricular difference between academic and honors level classes, yet there is an implied but subjective expectation that there will be deeper examination and reading of content in courses designated as honors. The curricular philosophy statement for all secondary English courses, regardless of grade or rigor level is as follows:

> The curriculum integrates the processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing with the contents of language and literature. Because these five language processes begin and continue to develop in conjunction with each other,

> the process approach to teaching ELA fosters a natural and balanced integration of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. Integrating language processes within a context encourages students to transfer the knowledge and skills learned to everyday situations in and out of school. (CCPS Reading/Language Arts, 2023)

In addition to the differences in teacher capacity and willingness to implement curricular content for honors versus academic classrooms, practices for determining which students can enroll in honors and AP courses can differ across high schools. Across the system, students are placed in honors classes based on subjective factors, such as teacher recommendations and previous year's performance, both of which can vary based on the classroom environment and teacher expectations.

Detracking Experience in CHS

In 2017, CHS became the first high school in the district to discuss the why Black students are underrepresented in enrollment in rigorous coursework, specifically at the high school level. At the start of this exploration in the 2017–2018 school year, Black students comprised 24% of the CHS population, and most were enrolled in academic (not honors) math, social studies, and science courses. Black students accounted for 6% of enrollment in AP science, 5% in AP math, and 10% in AP English. Additionally, only 5% of all AP students were Black.

As an administrator in CHS, I, along with my school leadership team colleagues (administrators, counselors, and department leads) began to discuss the data and question the relevancy of our practice for recommending students for honors courses. A particular focus was the lack of a distinctly different curricula. As a result, in 2018, CHS began a

grassroots detracking initiative to remedy this issue within the building. While CHS began the initiative in CCPS, two other CCPS high schools developed their own grassroots detracking initiative in subsequent years. The details of these initiatives will be discussed in greater detail later in this section. The focus of this dissertation is on understanding teacher perception of their support and engagement during the initial implementation of detracking.

Evidence Supporting the Problem

This section will present data on the scope of how Black students are underrepresented in enrollment in rigorous coursework at the high school level, both nationally and locally.

National Data

Lack of access to rigorous coursework for Black students is evident throughout the nation, as in CCPS. According to Civil Rights Data Collection (2017), 15.4% of American high school students are Black, yet only 10.2% of students nationwide enrolled in one or more AP classes (the only national data that show rigorous coursework enrollment) are Black. This is important because, according to a College Board report by Mattern et al. (2013), students who complete AP courses are more likely to succeed in college, with non-AP students having a four-year graduation rate of 38%, compared with 58% for AP students. In addition, nationally, only 8.5% of all students across all grades are enrolled in gifted and talented programs are Black.

The most heavily studied area regarding rigorous coursework access can be found in mathematics. According to Douglas and Attewell (2017), students denied access to rigorous coursework in math are prevented from accessing educational and social

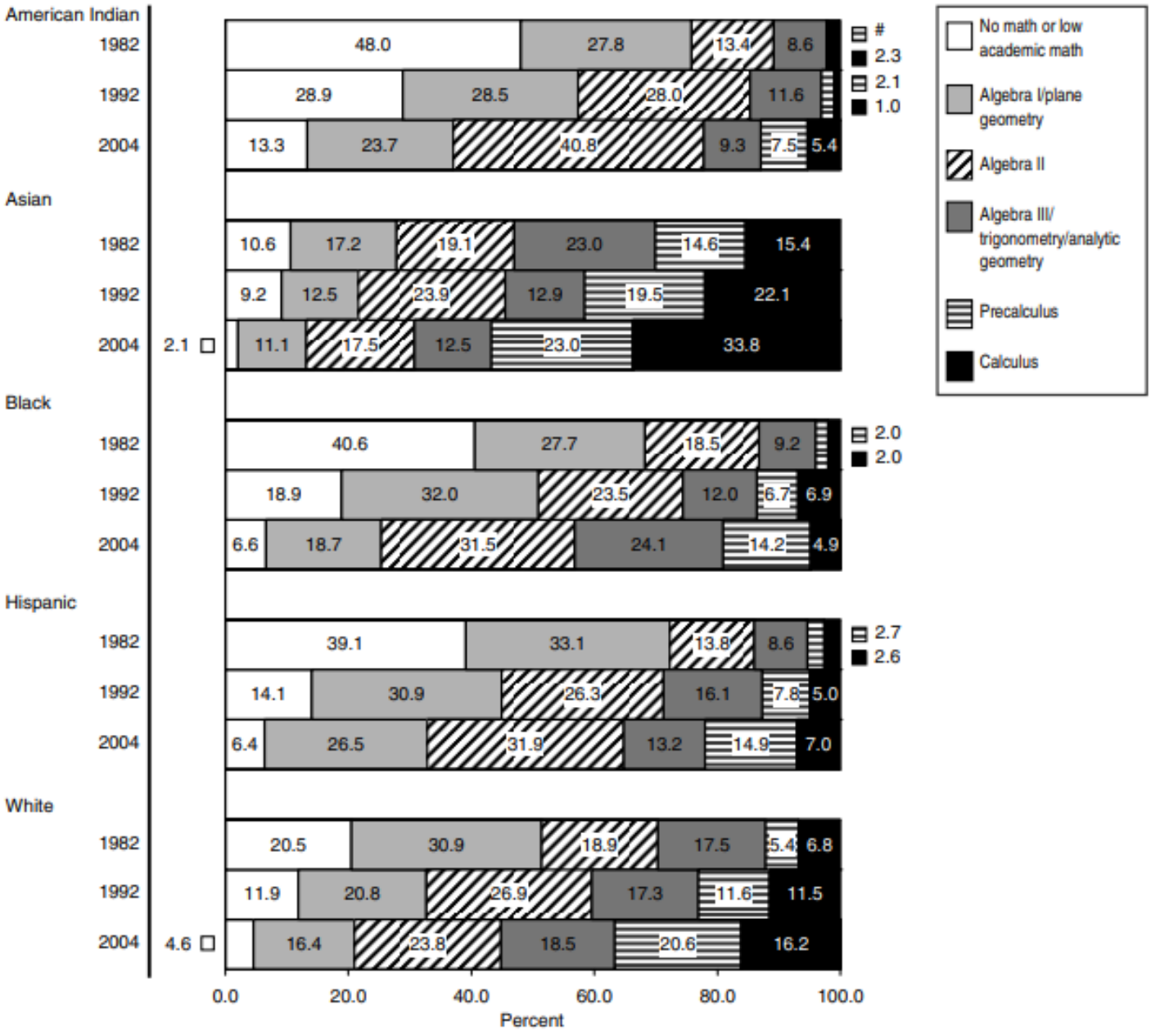
mobility because math course placement is viewed as a prominent gatekeeper to access chances, such as college opportunities. Douglas and Attewell (2017) further explain that participation in rigorous math classes better prepares students for SAT and ACT tests that are widely used for college acceptance. Nationally, Black students are disproportionately denied access to Algebra I in 8th grade, which is an early indicator of access to rigor (Office of Civil Rights, 2017). According to the US Department of Education (2016), 24% of all 8th graders were enrolled in Algebra 1, and only 12% of that number were Black students. Furthermore, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) examined the differences in education participation and attainment among students in various racial groups. It examined rigorous high school courses through an analysis of students who were able to earn credit in calculus before graduation. Only 6% of Black students from the longitudinal study were able to earn calculus credit, as opposed to 45% of Asian students and 18% of White students. The results demonstrate the effects of Algebra I tracking in earlier grades and its denial of opportunity for rigorous course taking.

A similar study by Dalton et al. (2007) found limited access to advanced math courses for Black students, with little improvement from findings published in 1982, 1992, and 2004. Figure 1 shows that in 1982, only 12.2% of White students accessed pre-calculus and calculus courses, but by 2004, that number grew to 36.8%. Conversely, Black students have seen limited growth in their access to rigorous math courses. In 1982, only 4% of Black students took pre-calculus or calculus courses, and this number grew to 19.1% in 2004, still much lower than the White access rate. Although there is some encouraging growth, the gap is widening, as White access grew by 24% compared

to just 15% for Black students. The data show that Black students experience access barriers throughout their educational careers and across other content areas.

Figure 1

Percentage of High School Graduates who Completed Different Levels of Mathematics Courses, by Race/Ethnicity: 1982, 1992, and 2004.



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, Asian includes Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian includes Alaska Native. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. See appendix table B-5 for standard errors for this figure.

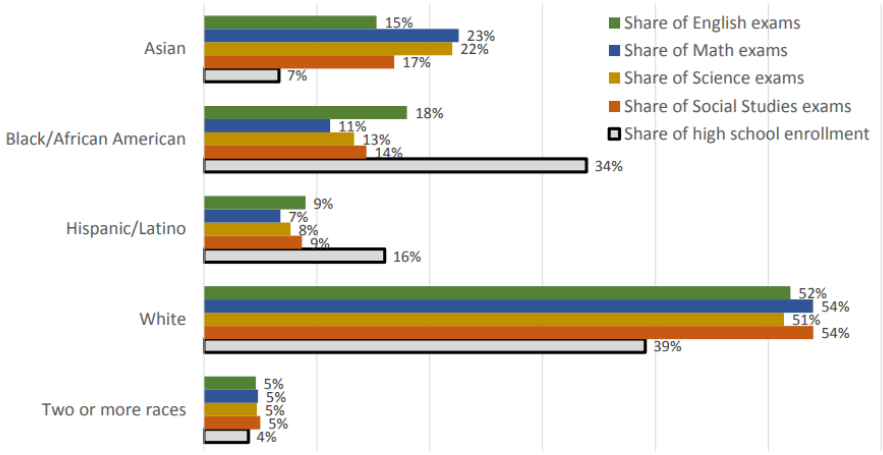
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond Longitudinal Study of 1980 Sophomores (HS&B-So:80/82), "High School Transcript Study"; National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/92), "Second Follow-up, Transcript Survey, 1992"; and Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), "First Follow-up, High School Transcript Study, 2004."

Maryland Data

Since there is no statewide data that reports honors access, student enrollment in AP courses is perhaps the most reliable measure of involvement in rigorous coursework. MSDE (2018) released the demographic breakdown of AP tests taken by Maryland students in 2018. The data revealed a sizable gap in the percentage of Black students enrolled in Maryland schools (34%) compared to the percentage of Black students who took an AP exam in 2018, which ranged from 11% to 18% by subject. Conversely, White students accounted for 39% of the Maryland student population in that year but were overrepresented as test takers in all AP exam areas, with 51% to 54% representation by

Figure 2

Share of 2018 AP Exams by Subject, Taken by Student Group, Compared to Share of Total Enrollment



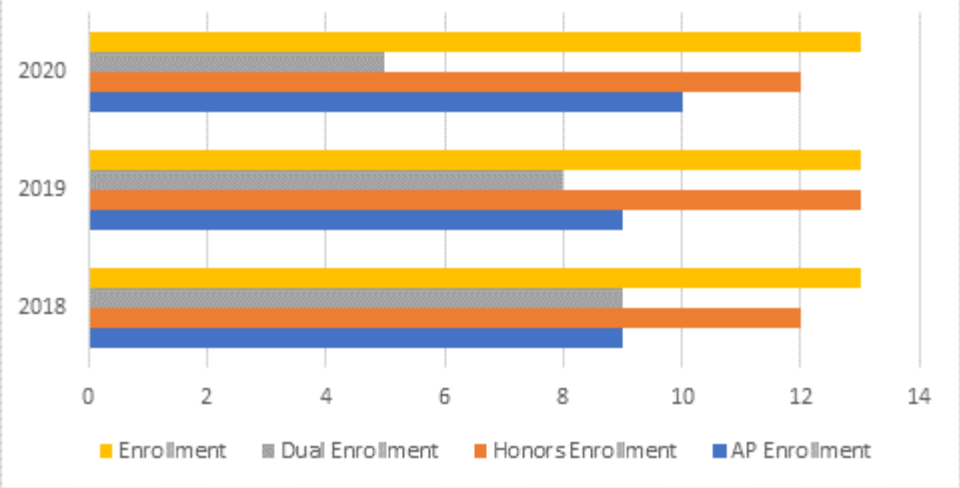
CCPS Data

Local system data allow for a slightly deeper exploration of Black student access to rigorous curricula, as one can examine not only AP but also dual enrollment and honors enrollment. In 2018, Black students accounted for 13% of CCPS total enrollment of high school students in that school year. Yet, Black students were underrepresented in

enrollment in all rigorous curriculum options (see Figure 3). Between 2018-20, there was a gradual increase in AP enrollment among all students as well as a decrease in dual enrollment participation. Honors enrollment appeared the highest and closest to the total enrollment of Black secondary students.

Figure 3

Black High School Student Representation in CCPS Rigorous Coursework



Access to Rigorous Coursework in CHS

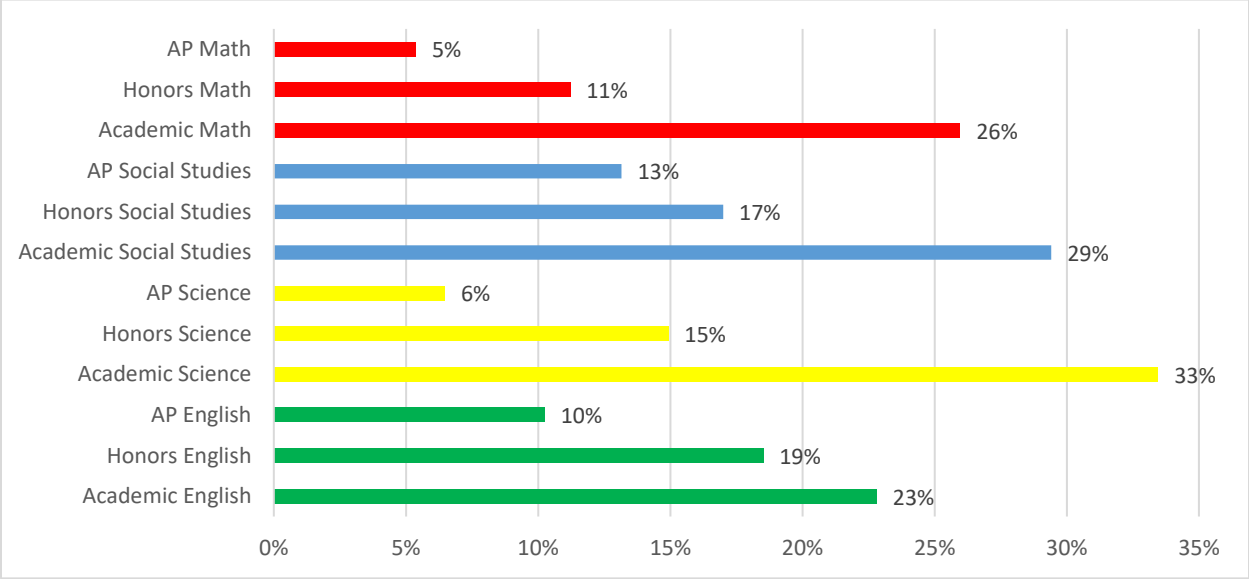
Three levels of coursework are available to students in CHS: academic, honors (with some honors courses providing dual enrollment college-credit bearing opportunities), and AP. Academic-level classes are for students who, according to teacher recommendations, need more academic support. Generally, students placed in academic courses score below proficiency on state assessments in all state-tested areas (Algebra 1, English 10, and Government) and usually earn less than a B in the previous year's prerequisite course (for example, a student in Academic English 10 likely earned a C or lower in Academic English 9). Honors-level classes are designed for more academically capable students based on their prerequisite course grades, state assessment scores (scoring either proficient or advanced), and teacher recommendations. AP courses follow

curricula set forth by the College Board, and placement is based on the previous year's performance in the prerequisite course and teacher recommendations.

Figure 4 shows the inequitable distribution of Black students across the three levels of courses in the school year 2017–2018, the school year prior to the first schoolwide detracking effort in CCPS. During that year, Black students comprised 24% of the school population, and most were enrolled in academic math, social studies, and science courses. Black students accounted for 6% of enrollment in AP science, 5% in AP math, and 10% in AP English. Additionally, during the 2017–18 school year, 52.9% of all students at CHS took at least one AP course. A deeper look shows that 58% of White students were enrolled in at least one AP course, compared to only 36% of Black students. Only 5% of all AP students were Black in 2017–18, compared to 26% in academic classes.

Figure 4

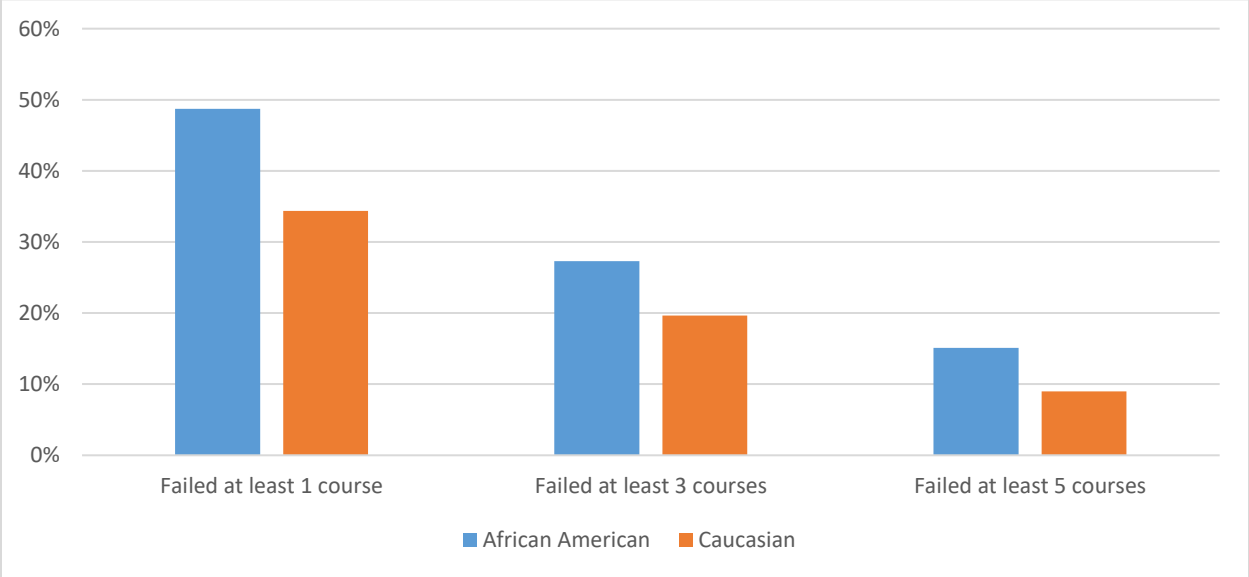
CHS Black Proportional Representation by Level, 2017 – 2018



A rationale often given to assigning students to a less rigorous course is to help them attain higher grades. Figure 5 shows that 49% of Black students at CHS earned at least one failing quarter grade during the 2017–18 school year, compared to 34% of White students. Considering that Black students were taking less rigorous courses at a greater rate than White students, this increased failure rate is especially troubling. Additionally, since advancement to rigorous courses is based on the previous year's grades and teacher recommendations, these data reveal another barrier to Black students accessing future rigorous coursework.

Figure 5

Proportion of Group with Failing Quarter Grades During the 2017-18 School Year



Performance on State Assessments

Black students are also ill-prepared for success on state standardized assessments. The most recent scores from MSDE (2023) report that in the 2020-21 school year, only 53.5% of all Maryland students were proficient in MCAP English 10. Black students showed only a 41.1% proficiency rate—a 12.4% gap between Black students and the

total population. At CHS, students achieved proficiency at a higher rate than the state average, but the gap was greater between Black students and their White peers. The same report showed that, on the 2020-21 English 10 MCAP assessment, 79.9% of White CHS students achieved proficiency compared to 48.3% of Black CHS students—a 31.6% gap between White and Black students.

In summary, although Black students are given access to rigorous courses at a lower rate than their White peers, they are failing courses and underperforming on state assessments at a much higher rate, thus perpetuating a cycle of poor educational opportunities for Black students. In the next section, I will highlight the consequences of denying rigorous opportunities to Black students.

Consequences of Lack of Access to a Rigorous HS Curriculum

For Black high school graduates, current educational practices often result in a lack of college access and ultimately lower employment outcomes. Rubin and Noguera (2004) explain that "tracking serves to perpetuate and reinforce educational inequities along race and class lines" (p. 93). The lower expectations communicated to Black students can lead to school disengagement and discipline issues and reduce their potential to graduate. According to Rubin and Noguera (2004), children in lower-tracked classes are often exposed to lower teacher expectations, a less rigorous curriculum, and weaker instructional strategies, thus making them unprepared to move into more challenging coursework.

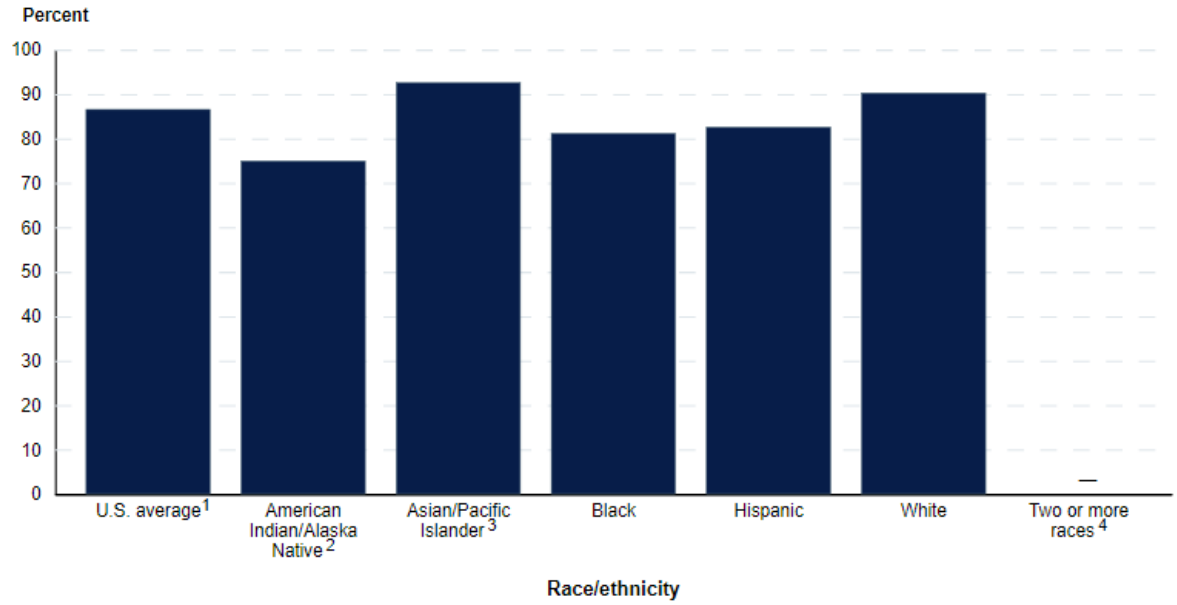
Impact on Graduation

Students who are not exposed to rigorous coursework are less likely to receive a high school diploma. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2020),

the rigor of the high school curriculum is one of the top indicators of whether a student will graduate from high school. In fact, the rigor of a student's coursework is more important than parent education level, family income, and race as predictors of student high school completion. Completion of a high school diploma is critical to productive citizenship. Since Black students are less likely to receive a diploma than their White classmates (81% of Black students earned their diploma in 2020 as compared to 90% of White students), Black communities are oftentimes placed at a disadvantage in society (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Maryland's 2018 graduation rate showed a slightly larger gap (9.5%) between White and Black students, with 93.5% of White students and 84% of Black students graduating from high school after four years of enrollment (MD Report Card, 2023).

Figure 6

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for Public High School Students, by Race/Ethnicity: 2019-20

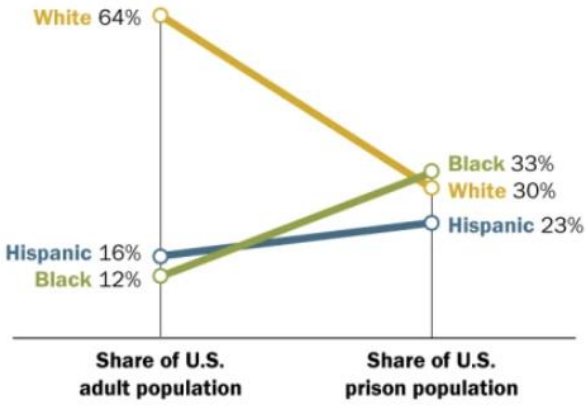


According to Dillon (2009), even more alarming is the situation in which one in 10 male high school dropouts are incarcerated, compared to one in 35 male high school

graduates. In the United States, a disproportionate number of Black citizens are incarcerated compared to Whites. According to the Gramlich (2019), the racial makeup of US prisons compared to the general population reveals that Blacks represent only 12% of the US population yet make up 33% of the prison population (see Figure 7). Since Dillon (2009) reveals that dropping out of high school is a risk factor for future incarceration, it is important that educational systems change to create better outcomes for Black students.

Figure 7

US Adult Population and US Prison Population by Race and Hispanic Origin 2017



Impact on College Enrollment and Future Success

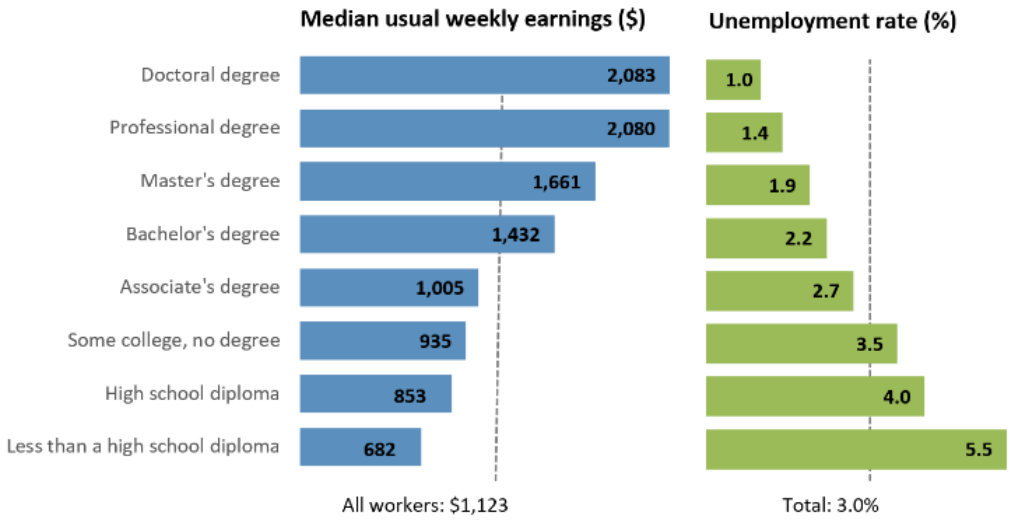
For Black students who do exit high school with a diploma but through a less rigorous high school courseload, there is an increased risk of needing remedial college courses that do not offer college credit but instead work to fill the gaps needed to access college-level material. According to Libassi (2018), college students of color need remedial education courses at a disproportionate rate, with 56% of Black students requiring college remediation compared to 35% of White students (the same report indicates that Maryland ranks third worst in the nation for the percentage of students

requiring remedial college courses at 50%). The likelihood of a student enrolled in a remedial course graduating from college is dramatically lower than a nonremedial student, as many students drop out before completing their remedial sequences and never start credit-bearing college coursework. In fact, Bautsch (2011) found that less than 50% of remedial students continue beyond their remedial courses to take credit-bearing courses.

It is no surprise that students who exit high school without a diploma or do not earn a college degree earn less and demonstrate a higher unemployment rate than those with a degree. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), those who earn a bachelor's degree or higher make well over the median salary of $1123 per week.

Figure 8

Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2022 Data



Those with an associate degree or less than a high school diploma earn less. In fact, US adults without a high school diploma earn, on average, approximately $682 per week and face a 5.5% unemployment rate—more than double the rate than those who have a Bachelor's degree.

Impact on Discipline and Disengagement

As noted above, the lower expectations associated with course tracking can lead to student disengagement, and there is a strong connection between disengagement and disciplinary issues. For example, Ogbu (2003) found that discipline problems, academic disengagement, and achievement gaps were strongly intertwined in a Black student's school experience. Ogbu (2003) conducted a study that focused on the academic performance of Black American students and found that more Black students were concerned with whether a teacher "cared for them" than their level of expertise in a content area. He argued that Black students experience social segregation throughout their schooling and feel a sense of mistrust toward teachers (Ogbu, 2003). In fact, this feeling of mistrust and focus on "liking a teacher" leads to conflicts, which eventually leads to discipline issues. Doll et al. (2013) analyzed longitudinal studies to determine the push (in-school issues), pull (out-of-school enticements), and falling out (other disengagement issues) factors that explain why students leave high school before receiving their diplomas. The top school-related factors self-reported by high school dropouts included failing courses, not getting along with teachers, not feeling a sense of belonging, and not getting along with peers.

Suspensions. Recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) show that, of the 2.6 million public school students suspended in the 2013–14 school year, 13.7% of students were Black—more than any other race—while White students accounted for only 3.4%, making a Black student 25 times as likely as a White student to be suspended from school. Beyond the obvious consequences of missed instruction and negative school perception, Bacher-Hicks et al. (2019) found that students

who receive an out-of-school suspension (OSS) are 15% to 20% more likely to be incarcerated as adults, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. Moreover, the use of OSS shows little impact on the achievement of non-suspended students from the removal of disruptive peers and only shows negative educational impacts on suspended students (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019).

Locally, the same discipline trends can be found within Maryland and CCPS. According to the Office of Civil Rights (2018), in the 2017–18 school year, 39,543 Maryland students received a suspension, and 60% of those students were Black, while only 22% were White. It is important to note that Black students account for only 33.6% of Maryland Public School's student population, while White students account for 36.5% of the total. In Cooper County, 2,052 students received a suspension during the 2018–19 school year. Of those suspended, 25% were Black students and 57% were White. In Cooper County during the 2018-19 school year, Black students account for 12.7% of the total student population, while White students account for 69.9% of the total population. Therefore, a Black student is suspended at a rate 2.1 times that of White student. Nationally, statewide, and locally, there is a consistent over-representation of Black students who are suspended. The following section describes potential causes leading to the under-representation of Black secondary students in more rigorous coursework.

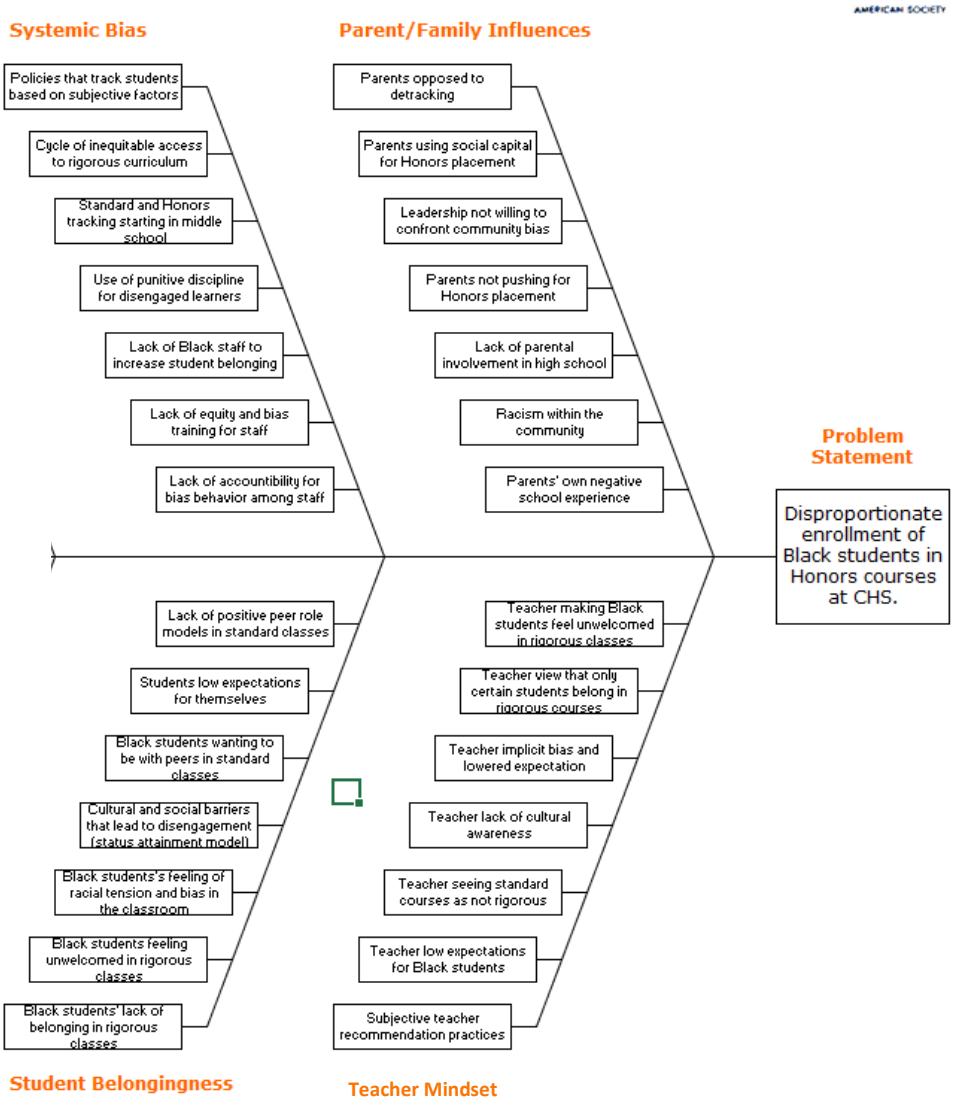
Causes of Disproportionate Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework

Although there are several factors that contribute to a Black student's discrepant educational outcomes, I focus on access to rigor in high school because it is a contributing factor to lower outcomes and one that could be addressed by educational leaders. Therefore, my causal system analysis (CSA) is focused on enrollment in rigorous

coursework in grades 9–12. My CSA reveals several possible factors, including school practices, policies, and approaches that lead to the under-enrollment of Black students in rigorous courses. Figure 9 below illustrates the major and potential causal factors that can be addressed within a school system: family influence, teacher capacity, student belongingness, and systemic bias. I review the research related to each of these major factors below. A number of factors in a student's home, community, and school life can set him/her on a path of lower expectations and a less rigorous curriculum. Many of these issues, such as the effects of poverty, are complicated and interrelated and outside of the school system's control, so these were not included in my CSA.

Figure 9

Causal System Analysis of Disproportionate Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework



Parent and Family Influence on School Policies

As noted in a study by Brantlinger et al. (1996), a common issue with any school reform initiative is that privileged parents are often resistant to changes that they view could potentially harm their own children's chances of success. As a result, districts tend to avoid discussions around detracking and heterogenous grouping. Brantlinger et al. (1996) conducted an interpretive inquiry study in which they interviewed educated

middle-class White mothers who were known to be active in school affairs. They discovered that "educated middle-class mothers…who believe in integrated and inclusive education, still support segregated and stratified school structures that mainly benefit students of the middle class" (Brantlinger et al., 1996, p. 571).

Kohn (1998) argued that, since research shows that the improved instruction found in high-track classes (i.e., honors and AP) yields better results and not the fact that students are homogenously grouped, parent objections to detracking are not about loss of high-quality learning and more about excluding students they perceive as distraction to learning, essentially those students who do not exhibit their own cultural expectations for classroom behavior. The research also indicates that Black parents often feel disenfranchised about determining their children's educational plan. Bridges et al. (2012) conducted a study of a group of Black parents and their involvement in the education of their children. Although Black parents in the study expressed a strong desire for their child to attend a four-year college, they lacked the knowledge to support their child's academics and felt that they had no personal power to address systemic issues, such as inequitable access.

The preferences of more educated and middle-class parents increase the impact of social capital on a student's educational success. Cohen and Prusak (2001) define social capital as "the stock of active connections among people; the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible" (p. 4). In CCPS, White parents represent the dominant culture, as 70% of the student population identifies as White. As such, White parents may feel more comfortable advocating for their children and voicing

concern over initiatives they perceive as harmful to their child's educational experience. Conversely, Posey-Maddox (2017) found that Black parents find more difficulty advocating for their child due to the "impact of microaggressions on their sense of belonging and engagement in predominantly White spaces and institutional settings" (p. 30).

Teacher Mindset and Disproportionate Enrollment in Rigorous Courses

Another contributing factor to the underrepresentation of Black students in rigorous courses is the teacher mindset, which has the potential to perpetuate lowered expectations and outcomes for minority students (Mahatmya et al., 2016). As noted earlier, currently, in CCPS, 70% of the student population is White as are 80% of CCPS teachers. In this system, teachers hold a great deal of power as "gatekeepers," who decide whether a student should be recommended for rigorous coursework. The mismatch between teacher race/ethnicity and a student's race can contribute to decisions not to recommend Black students for rigorous coursework.

According to Mahatmya et al. (2016), over the past 30 years, the population of White students in US K–12 classrooms has decreased by 20%. However, Taie and Goldring (2017) reported that in 2017, 80% of public-school teachers were White and 77% were female. These numbers show that, while White women dominate the teaching profession, many of their students come from different races and backgrounds. Mehta (2022) believes that this deeply entrenched norm has "reinforced dominant racial hierarchies, as it asked everyone who was not White and privileged to accommodate themselves to middle-class White norms" (p. 1). Moreover, Mahatmya et al. (2016) asserted that White teachers tend to develop lower-quality relationships and demonstrate

lowered expectations for their students of color. Rubie-Davies et al. (2006) explored the connection between teacher expectations and student self-perceptions and found that students exposed to high teacher expectations demonstrated higher self-perceptions. Teachers with lower expectations were associated with more negative student self-perceptions.

An analysis of data obtained from a longitudinal study that followed a cohort of 10th grade students for a decade by Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) confirms the connection between teacher bias and student outcomes. The analysts found that teachers in the study expected 58% of their White high school students to obtain a four-year college degree, as opposed to only 37% of their Black students. Ultimately, Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) discovered that, "teacher expectations do not merely forecast student outcomes, but that they also influence outcomes by becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. Moreover, we find that the nature of White teachers' expectations places Black students at a disadvantage" (p. 68). They suggest that schools work to diversify their teaching staff and increase teacher training on bias and high expectations for all (Gershenon & Papageorge, 2018). Fortunately, according to Mahatmya et al. (2016), an increase in teachers' cultural awareness improved the probability that they "held higher perceptions of educational attainment for students perceived to have low school connectedness" (p. 443). Newton and Sandoval (2015) also found that students' expectations were positively associated with their perception of how far their teachers thought they could go, demonstrating how a strong teacher–student relationship and a teacher holding high expectations can shape a student's educational aspirations.

Because teachers play a major role in how students are recommended for enrollment in certain courses, students with preferable academic behaviors end up in honors (or more rigorous) courses, and students with more challenging behaviors in academic courses. This practice allows educators to sort students into groups which as Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) noted, can be influenced by teachers' explicit and implicit biases about Black students.

Colorblindness ideology also has the potential to impact teacher mindset when instructing diverse learners. According to Mayfield (2021), educators who embrace this ideology, "deny or dismiss the existence of individual or structural racism; blame generalized character attributes for disparate outcomes; normalize inequalities; and minimize or dismiss the long-term effects of systemic racism" (p. 33). As CCPS currently works to address the teacher mindset through regular equity training, the colorblindness ideology of some teachers allows them to "deflect conversations away from racism, suppress people's ability to address racial issues, and ultimately serve to preserve the status quo" (Mayfield, 2021, p. 34). This mindset has the potential to further produce discrepant outcomes for Black students in the classroom.

Lead Higher Initiative at CHS

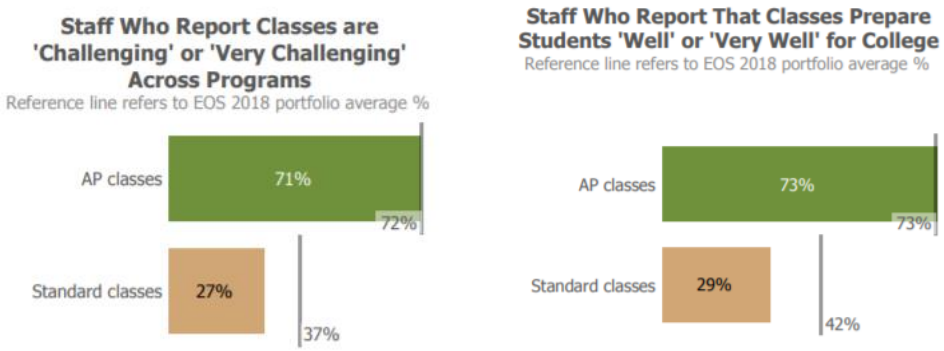
To address biases that exist in the teacher mindset, schools must develop capacity among educators so that all students can and will exceed rigorous expectations. CHS has been continually supported by a Lead Higher grant to improve Black AP enrollment since 2017. CCPS hired Lead Higher's services after examining AP enrollment data district-wide and identifying CHS as the high school most in need of closing its enrollment gap. Lead Higher is an initiative run by Equal Opportunities Schools (EOS), a company whose

mission, which is posted on their website, is to “ensure that students of color and low-income students have equitable access to America’s most academically intense high school programs and succeed at the highest levels” (EOS, 2023). Lead Higher achieves this goal by increasing access to rigorous courses for minority students, helping schools develop support for these students, and engaging staff in improving their equitable practices and cultural responsiveness.

In the fall of 2017, all staff members and students were surveyed by Lead Higher on their beliefs about AP preparation and support and their perceptions of the academic courses at CHS. Figure 10 reveals that staff members generally did not feel that academic classes were challenging or prepared students for college. This led to a multi-year effort to change our schools’ practices in relation to offering rigorous courses to all students.

Figure 10

CHS Staff Perceptions of Standard and AP Courses



Student Belongingness and Disproportionate Enrollment in Rigorous Courses

Black students’ low enrollment in rigorous coursework can also be attributed to their feelings of belonging. Noguera (2003) asserted that many Black students, especially males, engage in self-destructive actions, such as poor behavior and low academic outputs, which contribute to their “underachievement and marginality” (p. 445).

Furthermore, they are also more likely to find themselves in "marginal roles and discouraged from challenging themselves by the adults who are supposed to help them" (Noguera, 2003, p. 446). Additional research on student belongingness reveals the complicated barriers that take place in a Black child's school experience. Anderson et al. (2019) assert that Black students develop an early understanding of racial tension and often internalize negative messages about their achievement ability. Additionally, Black students reported feeling *invisible* in their classrooms, as if their teachers cared more about other students than them.

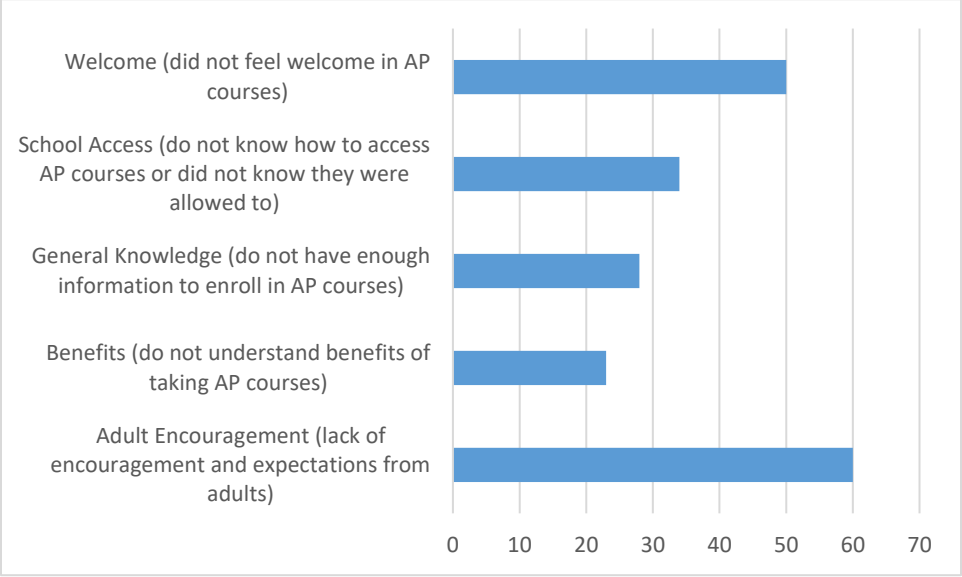
Researchers have identified theories and frameworks to explain why Black students feel as though they do not belong in traditional school settings and are unable to access equal opportunities in our current educational structure. Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2007) use the Operational Citizenship Theoretical Framework, which "investigates the ability of citizens to exercise their rights as opposed to simply having them" (p. 169). Although opportunities for rigorous instruction are theoretically available to all students, there may be pre-existing barriers that prevent Black students from accessing them. Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2007) argue that Black students are given the responsibilities of the system (i.e., attending school and following rules) but are not afforded the systems' rights (i.e., rigorous coursework).

Based on interviews and surveys conducted as part of the Lead Higher initiative, CHS found evidence that a problem existed regarding Black students' perceptions about their sense of belonging in rigorous classes. In an interview conducted in 2018 with the CHS principal as part of the Lead Higher initiative, he stated that there is a perception among the school's Black students that they do not belong in challenging classes, such as

honors and AP. In these classes, most students are White, so Black students do not see themselves as belonging (CHS principal, personal communication, January 2018). The same Lead Higher survey that was used to survey teachers also identified 120 underrepresented students (identified as either minority and/or economically disadvantaged) who had AP potential (based on factors determined by Equal Opportunity Schools) and asked them why they did not access AP courses. Figure 11 shows that 50% of these students reported that they felt unwelcome in AP classes, while 60% felt they had no adult support, confirming the principal's concern about student belonging.

Figure 11

Underrepresented Students' Perceived Barriers to AP Access



Systemic Bias and the Cycle of Inequitable Access to a Rigorous Curriculum

Lack of access, systemic bias, and student sense of belonging contribute to a cycle of lack of opportunity for Black students in high schools. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* ended educational segregation and declared that Black students would no longer receive education in a separate learning environment, constraints have been placed

on underrepresented populations to undermine this decision, both intentionally and unintentionally, effectively preserving de facto segregation (Alexander, 2010). A number of studies have shown the current crisis facing Black students in accessing equitable, rigorous learning opportunities. For instance, Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2007) interviewed a group of Black teachers about the gap in Black students' AP participation. The Black educators interviewed in this study were concerned about the lack of access for Black students, which the study referred to as the opportunity gap. According to Klopfenstein (2004), Black high school students enroll in AP courses at approximately half the rate of White students. Additionally, he found that Black students who attend high schools with high AP enrollment still do not complete AP classes at the same rate as their White classmates (Klopfenstein, 2004). More recently, Ewing and Wyatt (2023) reported that there is a 25-32% percentile points gap between the percentage of White and Black students earning a score of 3 or higher across the ten AP subject tests.

Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) examined data from California to document what they explain as the cycle of decreased opportunity through critical race theory. They used this theory as a framework that seeks to find and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions throughout a minority student's educational experience. Critical race theory in education includes five elements: the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality, the challenge to dominant ideals around school failure, the commitment to social justice, the importance of experiential knowledge, and the transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) concluded that the inequities found in the California schools used for the study exist throughout the country, as most high schools are

inherently inequitable to minority students. Due to these perceived and real constraints, access to rigor is restricted for Black students.

Cooper (2008) used the status attainment model, which attributes students' differences in their educational aspirations to their social class membership, to explore how educational aspirations weaken for minority students throughout their high school careers. Cooper (2008) explored how individuals invest resources to improve their socioeconomic status through analyzing existing data. The study suggests that minority students demonstrated early college aspirations at the elementary level; however, aspirations tended to weaken as students entered later high school grades (Cooper, 2008). More specifically, Black and Latino male students' aspirations to achieve a bachelor's degree decreased by one-quarter between the 10^{th} and 12^{th} grade. The study asserts that cultural and social influences were the main contributing factors to the students' decreased aspirations, more so than economic measures (Cooper, 2008).

Tracking Policies in CCPS

One strategy to improve Black students' access to rigorous curricula is to eliminate policies that sort students into certain coursework and place Black students at a disadvantage early in their school careers. Until 2016, CCPS used performance on Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) assessments in second grade, state test performance in third grade, and elementary grade reports to determine if students were eligible for honors-level courses starting in fourth grade. Due to limited staffing, as few as 25 students at a grade level within a building were eligible for this program, thus eliminating many potential honors students. This tracking policy led to an under-enrollment of Black students in honors courses and an over-representation of Black students in less rigorous

academic-level elementary classes. In 2017, the CCPS leadership recognized this issue and changed practices in elementary honors identification to make it more inclusive and less selective by keeping students in heterogenous classrooms and offering Gifted and Talented services through supplemental offerings.

In an interview I conducted with the supervisor of secondary principals, she shared that stakeholders (parents, teachers, administration, etc.) often set low expectations for students based on their home lives or other environmental factors. She stated that grouping students based on their perceived ability level creates a cycle that serves to hold the students in less rigorous classes so that, by the time they enter high school, it is too late to change their academic behaviors, and arbitrary perceptions become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy (CCPS supervisor of secondary principals, personal communication, January 2018). Also in a 2018 interview, the principal of CHS expressed that the early sorting of students into classes in elementary and middle grades was the main factor contributing to the school's low AP enrollment for Black students. He stated, "There are not enough students who meet the prerequisites to be recommended for AP classes. AP courses may not be an accurate predictor of post-secondary success, but right now, that is what we use. This probably has to do with tracking from an early grade level" (CHS principal, personal communication, January 2018).

Related to tracking policies is determining the prerequisites for AP enrollment. Griffin and Dixon (2017) described a high-poverty school district in the Midwest that removed all enrollment requirements for AP: teacher recommendations, high GPAs, and course requirements. Unfortunately, less than one-third of the students passed the AP tests. According to Solorzano and Ornelas (2004), it is critical that students pass these

exams to see the real benefits of AP enrollment. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) cite that "students who pass exams, earning a 3 or higher, not only can receive college credit, but also are more likely to succeed in college than their peers" (p. 3). Therefore, Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) recommend that the system develop an approach that addresses rigor in early education while avoiding tracking structures that divert students away from meaningful, rigorous options.

Although I was not in a position to change a number of the causes identified in my CSA, I was able to test one theory of improvement, which was to remove the multiple course options in CHS and provide universal access to Honors courses to all students. In the next section, I describe my theory of how to improve access to rigorous courses for Black students at CHS, its ultimate aim, and the drivers that I believe influence that improvement.

Theory of Improvement

My theory of improvement is based on the aforementioned research of Futrell and Gomez (2008), Rubin (2006), Mehta (2020), and Oakes (2000), which shows the need for all students to have access to rigorous curricula and the detrimental effects of tracking, especially for minority students.

Aim Statement

The long-term aim of the improvement drivers is to increase access of Black students in CPPS so that Black students show an increased representation across schools in AP English courses (AP Language and AP Literature) as a long-term effect of detracking. With the long-term aim as the goal, improvement efforts began in one CCPS high school, CHS, under the leadership of myself and the school leadership team. The

sections below describe the theory of improvement that led to the development of a specific change in CHS, including universal honors courses through detracking beginning with 9th and 10th grade honors English.

Improvement Drivers

Based on the research reviewed, I identified two primary drivers for improvement that would help reach my aim: to provide equitable access to rigorous high school coursework and to develop and support the capacity and commitment of teachers to teach diverse groups of students in detracked classes. In the following sections, I present the research that supports these two drivers.

Primary Driver 1: Equitable Access. A common message among researchers is to provide equitable access to rigorous coursework and high expectations for all students. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) recommended establishing a college-going culture, creating a school culture supportive of advanced studies, considering making the default curriculum in all high schools the college preparatory curriculum, improving student access to qualified teachers and intensive academic support, and connecting with parents and the community around advanced study. However, this change is not simple. According to Mehta and Cohen (2017), "giving each and every student an engaging and intellectually ambitious education is the most difficult task reformers have attempted, and the one with which they [researchers and reformers] have had the least success in the mainstream" (p. 43). Such change requires a shift in one's traditional views of school (Mehta & Fine, 2019).

In their book, *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School*, Mehta and Fine (2019) share that schools must establish a very different set

of principles than have previously existed in order to create deeper learning for all. These principles are:

- Students as active producers rather than passive recipients.
- Learning by doing rather than by transmission clear purposes and external audiences rather than simply working to please the teacher.
- Multi-age groupings rather than age-graded classrooms.
- Integration of students with different skill levels rather than tracking.
- Learning through apprenticeship rather than didactic instruction. (p. 306)

Rubin and Noguera (2004) found that successfully detracked classrooms can reap great benefits. It is important that students know the difference between tracking and detracking, and the restrictions tracking inflicts on certain racial and socioeconomic populations. Detracking allows high-achieving students of color to feel decreased pressure; Rubin (2006) writes that "detracking, for these students, meant they no longer are faced with the choice between academic and social success, and instead could excel in a heterogeneous setting" (p. 97). Successful detracked classrooms can also provide rich, diverse learning experiences for students of all backgrounds, as they are exposed to the ideas and views of those different from them. However, Rubin and Noguera (2004) caution that "if high achieving students in detracked classes do not perceive students of color to be as smart or as competent, placing them together may merely reinforce racial stereotypes rather than counter them" (p. 96).

CCPS Course Enrollment Policies and Procedures. In CCPS, students experience formal course tracking as they enter 6th grade. In elementary school, students identified as Gifted and Talented receive support, such as supplementary coursework, for

acceleration within the general education elementary classroom beginning in 4th grade. Elementary teachers use standardized assessment data, class grades, and qualitative factors, such as classroom behavior, to determine which students should be enrolled in honors ELA and honors math 6. At that point, students are placed in a tracked system, and it is difficult to move into a more rigorous track, as noted by Oakes (2005), who stated that lower-tracked students "suffer clear and consistent disadvantages from tracking. Among students identified as average or slow, tracking often appears to retard academic progress" (p. 4). As a result, students in the lower courses continue to be placed in academic-level courses as they move through the remaining grades. This was clearly the case in CCPS, where fewer non-White students took honors courses when entering high school.

Among the factors identified as contributing to this problem was how CCPS students are recommended by teachers for honors- and academic-level 9th grade courses, which is based on previous courses a student has taken. This is the same factor used in elementary schools to place students into classes. As a result of the process, each year, students are recommended for the subsequent year's courses. There is the potential to move from honors to academic, or vice versa, based on that year's performance in the classroom and on state assessments. However, this rarely happens. There is little accountability for teachers' recommendations unless parents voice concerns about their children. Changing this practice became a major focus of change at CHS, the school that first developed and implemented a detracking program in 2018.

Primary Driver 2: Teacher Commitment and Capacity. Whenever a major structural change to traditional school practices, such as detracking, takes place, it is

critical that school leaders consider the characteristics of past successful educational reforms when engaging teachers in the change (Cohen & Mehta, 2017). This section will introduce research that argues the need for strong teacher commitment and the capacity to make a detracked program sustainable. According to Mehta and Cohen (2017), at least five characteristics often take place in a reform that successfully commits to and engages educators:

- Offering solutions to problems that educators previously knew existed and wanted to solve.
- Offering solutions that educators either did not know about or couldn't figure out how to solve, but they committed to the reform once they saw or believed that it would help.
- Meeting demands that arose from the political, economic, or social circumstances of schooling.
- Offering the instructional tools, training, and guidance educators needed to implement the reform in the classroom.
- Coinciding with the values of the educators, parents, and students they affected.

In order to increase the likelihood of program success, it is critical that school leaders consider these characteristics when developing and implementing detracking within a school building. Teachers must see the value of the program and feel prepared and supported during its initial implementation.

Engaging Teachers in the Detracking Effort to Build Commitment. For a reform to find success, teachers must feel as though they are deeply involved in the reform, which can best be achieved through leadership that is transformational,

collective, and intentional (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020). Transformational leaders understand that power is shared among all stakeholders and intentionally provide "individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 335).

According to Hubbard and Datnow (2020), while it is important that leaders have a shared vision and collective mindset, they must also practice intentional leadership to sustain teacher engagement and adaptation. Hubbard and Datnow (2020) believe that intentional leaders couple structural changes (detracking) with ongoing intentional interactions with teachers that work to foster collaboration, empower teachers to make decisions, and create a safe space for teachers to take risks.

Conversely, reform efforts can likely fail if leaders do not properly engage teachers through a collective and intentional leadership style (Holme & Rangel, 2012; Synder, 2017). When teachers feel that a reform is a top-down initiative happening *to* them rather than a shared reform happening *with* them, they often feel a loss of autonomy and an increase in marginalization (Synder, 2017). In school buildings that experience high turnover in leadership and teacher roles, the likelihood of engaging teachers in a reform effort is even more challenging (Holme & Rangel, 2012). Without proper dynamic relationships among staff to co-construct the reform, an "instability in both leadership and teaching positions erodes aspects of relational capital in schools (morale and trust), intellectual capital (teacher knowledge), and cognitive capital (norms and goals)" (Holme & Rangel, 2012, p. 260). Alkema (2020) further supports the need for leaders to demonstrate empowering behaviors during organizational changes and deter passive mismanagement and active interference behaviors, which will deter team

members from committing to changes. Therefore, it is critical that detracking takes place in schools where teachers are valued as co-creators of the change effort and view their school leaders as supportive and collaborative (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020).

Creating Structures That Foster Improvements in Instructional Capacity.

Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2007) suggested making college preparatory curriculum the default curriculum and establishing a culture that all will attend college, but providing access to honors courses for all is successful only when students receive strong instruction in heterogeneous classrooms (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). For a detracking initiative to become sustainable, leaders must address teacher capacity in instructional practices that reach all learners.

To improve instruction, Mehta (2015) suggested revamping schools to be "centers of inquiry" (p. 279), where teachers are not asked "to be implementers of ideas drawn up by others but rather active participants, working together to develop teaching ideas and solve problems of practice" (p. 280). Mehta (2015) also suggested breaking down the isolation of teaching by making collaboration a priority, as teachers work to examine data and revise teaching practices using a "plan-do-student-revise cycle" (p. 281).

Oakes et al. (1992) emphasized that teachers need time to work collaboratively to make meaning of best instructional practices to effectively implement them in the classrooms. If collaborative time is not afforded to teachers, it is likely that they will not gain the competency to execute these new strategies. Oakes et al. (1992) also suggested instructional approaches that best fit heterogeneous classrooms, such as cooperative learning, long-term individual projects, and classroom tasks that require active learning. They noted that not only do well-structured cooperative learning tasks produce

considerable intellectual gains, but they also help students develop social skills for working productively with others. Oakes et al. (1992) also suggested that teachers adjust their grading practices and develop a range of alternative assessments. By using more personalized strategies, such as portfolio assessments, and observing students in experiments or group discussions, teachers are demonstrating how hard work contributes to learning and preventing using standard assessments "for judgment about who is smart and who isn't" (Oakes et al., 1992, p. 449).

Addressing Curricular Needs to Support Teacher Instructional Capacity. Rubin (2006) discussed how curricula must have entry points for all levels of learners and that students will benefit most from a detracked curriculum that piques their interests and is varied in approach. He notes that previously lower-tracked students must have a strong support system in place, both in and outside of the classroom, to succeed. This requires strong culturally relevant pedagogy and multimodal approaches coupled with constant community-building within the classroom. When transitioning to a detracked model, it is important that teachers understand how to use high-leverage instructional practices to reach all learners.

According to Oakes and Lipton (1992), there are common curricular shifts and instructional best practices that were evident in successfully detracked schools. First, schools must use a rich, concept-based curriculum that develops deeper learning. In doing so, teachers can better account for differences in students' prior knowledge and ensure that students are not falling behind or becoming bored with the content. Reconstructing curricula for more depth and richness can be done through:

- Framing learning tasks as complex problems,

- Providing contexts that give meaning to facts,
- Taking informal knowledge seriously,
- Allowing for multiple answers,
- Promoting socially constructed knowledge, and
- Requiring long-term projects (p. 448).

Oakes and Lipton caution that, even when teachers are provided with support on instructional approaches and the shift in curricula, a detracking initiative's success hinges on developing teacher mindsets regarding a student's capacity to learn.

Addressing Teacher Mindset During Implementation. Oakes and Lipton (1992) assert that detracking often requires teachers to have a critical, and oftentimes unsettling, rethinking of fundamental educational norms. Most teachers are asked to "challenge their entrenched views of such matters as human capacities, individual and group differences, the purposes of schooling, and the ever-present tensions between the norms of competitive individualism and the more democratic norms of support and community" (p. 449).

It is critical that leaders have these difficult conversations and establish proper mindsets prior to implementing a detracked model. Rubin (2006) emphasized the importance of teacher attitude and perception when teaching heterogenous groups of students. If a teacher believes that certain students cannot access the curriculum, then these low expectations will affect outcomes. Rubin suggests teacher inquiry groups as a strategy for discussing detracking and for challenging teachers' beliefs about equitable classrooms. He also asserts that school leaders must use clear expectations and hard data to convince all stakeholders (most notably, parents and teachers) about the value of

detracking, even when opposition arises. Rubin states that schools will only find academic gains if they are able to establish a change in beliefs among all stakeholders. Once established, Rubin believes that teachers will find success not through their instructional practices but through establishing the following underlying principles of building a learning community that:

> respects and makes productive use of diverse contributions from varied learners; providing opportunities for diverse ways of learning; providing support to individuals as needed, challenging all students; keeping learners actively involved; building a year-long curriculum, which promotes the recycling of structure and ideas, with room for ever deepening levels of complexity; and considering learners to be in control of their learning and building structures that support them in challenging themselves. (p. 8)

Mehta and Fine (2019) believe that today's high schools require "deeper" teachers who are aware that their students of color have historically received a less-empowered education and shape their teaching in a way that commits to social justice. Moreover, these teachers "did not frame their students in deficit terms; nor did they, like many other teachers in our sample, see the urgency of 'catching up students on the basics' as precluding the kind of thinking they wanted for their students" (pp. 353–354). As opposed to traditional teachers, "deeper" teachers see their role as a facilitator of knowledge and their students as creative, curious, and capable creators of knowledge. These teachers see their students as people first, and care for them *through* their discipline or subjects, with a hope to "create seminal learning experiences that would affect their students beyond the specific content of the course: they tried to plant seeds

that might inspire many years of inquiry into their subject" (p. 352). Unfortunately, high schools contain a mix of traditional and "deeper" teachers, which can complicate a school's transition to detracking.

As noted earlier, Rubin and Noguera (2004) cautioned that many who moved to detracking were often unaware of the complexities of this movement and found sudden failure. Even though it is a viable reform technique, it requires a great deal of planning and training, specifically for teachers with traditional mindsets. Rubin and Noguera (2004) cited key social and academic issues that are usually found in detracked schools. For instance, socially, teachers sometimes confuse social integration and inclusion with academic equity. Although community integration is a positive outcome of detracking, the goal for students is to receive equal rigorous academic instruction. Rubin and Noguera (2004) assert that low-achieving students will demonstrate better outcomes through increased rigor in curriculum and instructional practices, not simply by exposure to more privileged peers. Rubin and Noguera (2004) also caution that another issue in detracked classrooms is the creation of social barriers, where students of similar academic levels and racial backgrounds tend to self-segregate.

Rubin and Noguero (2004) warn that, academically, there is the risk that teachers will "drift to the middle" when teaching a more heterogenous group of students. They may struggle with how to teach and assess students with a wide range of academic skills. As a result, more capable students can become bored and feel unchallenged, while lower-achieving students may feel overwhelmed by the material. Rubin and Noguera found that another academic issue in detracked classes is the concept of teachers "re-tracking" a room, such as accepting less rigorous, low-quality work from students that need more

support, rather than designing instruction with the structures and supports needed for all students to meet rigorous learning goals. Therefore, the implementation of a detracked program requires a great deal of planning and constant data analysis and reflection.

The Detracking Change Initiative

As briefly discussed under the Problem Statement, the detracking change initiative that CHS designed to respond to the problem of Black students' underrepresentation in enrollment in rigorous coursework created universal access to 9th and 10th grade Honors English courses as a first step toward increasing enrollments in AP English courses in the 11th and 12th grades. The intermediate aim was to enroll 98%[3] of CHS 9th and 10th grade students in Honors English at the beginning of the 2021–22 school year. The long-term aim is to increase Black students' representation in AP English Language and Composition (11th Grade) and AP English Literature Composition (12th Grade).

A detracked program that provides access for all students to Honors-level English 9 and 10 courses is one way to expose all students to rigorous curricula and to contribute to my long-term aim of increasing access for all secondary-level Black students to Advanced Placement courses. Figure 12 below presents the change initiative.

[3]The number cannot reach 100% due to students with significant disabilities attending regional programs in the school building who are assigned to self-contained English 9 and 10 classes—this population has yet to be mainstreamed into a fully inclusive environment.

Figure 12

Driver Diagram

Long-Term Aim	Intermediate Aims	Primary Driver
Increase access for Black students formerly in Academic-level courses to take and pass Advanced Placement courses.	1. 98% of CHS 9th and 10th grade students will be enrolled in Honors English at the beginning of the 2021–22 school year. 2. Black students at CHS will show an increased representation in AP English courses (AP Language and AP Literature) over time.	**Providing equitable access to rigorous high school coursework:** Remove systemic barriers so all students have the ability to access and achieve in Honors courses through the development of a detracked program for English 9 and English 10 at Calvert High School. **Teacher commitment and capacity:** Engage and develop 9th and 10th grade English teachers with the willingness and ability to teach heterogenous groups and the belief that all students can succeed in a detracked classroom.

CCPS Attempts to Address Disproportionate Access to Rigor

The efforts at CHS were initiated by the school leadership team in 2018, but CCPS had begun to pay attention to disproportionate enrollments in certain courses and to address equitable access to academically rigorous courses before the state began to draw attention to increasing opportunities for students through enrollment in more rigorous coursework. Traditionally, CCPS high schools have addressed achievement and behavioral gaps among students through School Improvement Plans. These plans have focused on achievement on state assessments, which are used to satisfy minimum graduation requirements, and on reducing the number of discipline referrals. However, several state and local system policies are now in place to address the equity gap

regarding student access to rigor. The most influential policies can be found in the Maryland State Consolidated Plan (2018), CCPS's Strategic Plan (2017), and the CCPS Equity Policy #1015 (2016).

In the Consolidated Plan released by MSDE (2018), a school is measured by its students' access to a well-rounded curriculum, which is defined as the "percent of students graduating or exiting . . . enrolled in an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) course; participated in dual enrollment; or enrolled in an MSDE-approved Career and Technical Education program at the CTE concentrator level or higher" (p. 28). When measuring a school's success, data are disaggregated to ensure that all students are accounted for. The MSDE emphasizes a commitment to equity through one of its guiding principles, which states, "a school cannot succeed if all its students do not succeed." The "all student" and various representative student groups will be included in the accountability system as required. Additionally, each indicator and measure are disaggregated and reported for every student group.

According to Cook-Harvey et al. (2016), Maryland's plan to hold schools accountable for all student groups receiving access to a well-rounded curriculum may compel school leaders to find ways for all students to receive "a high-quality 'thinking curriculum,' traditionally available only to a privileged few—an important step toward more equitable schooling" (p. 8). The mandates created by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) support working to close the equity gap to rigorous curricula access, as it demands that schools measure rigorous course-enrollment success with disaggregated data.

In the strategic plan released by CCPS (2017), one of the five major priority areas is equity. The district states that, in support of this priority area, it will "provide equitable learning opportunities to all students in order to help them become determined, independent, and successful learners" (CCPS Strategic Plan, 2017, p. 11). Two equity measures used to determine success are the percentage of staff perceiving high expectations and positive attitudes toward all students, regardless of their background, and the percentage of students perceiving these high expectations. Staff and students will be surveyed on the demographics of their rigorous classrooms, which will support the goal of increasing Black enrollment in Honors and AP courses. Additionally, the plan has a second priority area, Student Outcomes, which promotes increased AP access, an area that cannot be improved without all students first achieving Honors access. In this priority area, "the district hopes to level the playing field for all students to continue promoting a culture of equity and ownership" (CCPS Strategic Plan, 2017, p. 12) by offering rigorous curricula to all students. The district plans to support this priority area by closing all achievement gaps and enhancing opportunities for high-ability learners to thrive and be academically challenged. In summary, the CCPS strategic plan shows an awareness of inequities and an understanding that increasing rigor and access can improve student learning outcomes.

Prior to the development of the Strategic Plan, the CCPS administrative procedures governing equity (2016) were adopted "to govern the maintenance of equitable learning and working environments for all Cooper County Public Schools students and staff" (p. 1). This policy initiated several changes to CCPS practices and helped to make equity a priority in the district. In the policy, the district officially created

the District Equity Coordinator position and established the development of a District Equity Plan. A critical piece of this policy is that the district is now required to report its equity status to the Board of Education through an annual equity report. In this report, the district must share how it is closing the achievement and opportunity gaps for underrepresented populations. Additionally, the district must show its efforts to "increase participation of individuals from underrepresented groups in advanced academic programming" (p. 3). Equity has been an emphasis in the school district for the past several years, and system leaders are looking for ways to improve educational experiences for all students.

CCPS also adopted a policy statement regarding antiracism (2020), and one of its main purposes is "to remove the institutional barriers that create inequitable representations of students who receive gifted and special-education services, participate in advanced classes, and exhibit high academic performance and achievement" (CCPS Antiracism Policy, 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, the statement explains that the elimination of opportunity gaps will help all students learn, and it recognizes that these gaps have "significant intergenerational effects and perpetuate economic, social, and educational inequity" (CCPS Antiracism Policy, 2020, p. 2). Recently, CCPS has worked to eliminate tracking at the elementary level. At the middle school level, all students now participate in detracked social studies and sciences class, but tracking still exists for ELA and math courses. In 2020, CCPS established a detracking committee, which consists of a content supervisor and the Supervisor of Equity, in order to explore a systemic approach to beginning detracking in elementary school.

The Detracking Initiatives at CHS and Two Other High Schools. The specific initiative of removing barriers to rigorous coursework through providing universal access to 9th and 10th grade Honors English began at CHS. As noted earlier, the initiative was based on the theory of improvement that this would begin to increase enrollments of Black students in English AP courses in the 11th and 12th grades as well. Ultimately, if this first change shows promise, the practice could be expanded to other subjects. While I provide the most detail regarding the CHS process, two other system high schools also began their own grassroots detracking effort: Beckett High School (BHS) in 2020 and Mason High School (MHS)[4] in 2021.

Detracking at CHS. During school year 2017–2018, I served as an administrator at CHS when the administration, along with department chairs and various teachers, collectively named the CHS Detracking Team, began to investigate how to increase enrollment of Black students in AP courses. As noted earlier, the aim was to increase the enrollment of Black students in the two AP English courses (AP Language and AP Literature). In that school year, Black students represented only 10% of students in AP English courses at CHS. In that school year, CHS had a population of 1,206 students. 20.3% of its student population was considered Economically Disadvantaged (ED), 7.2% were Students with Disabilities, and 18.4% of students were Black. In 2017, 56.5% of all students were proficient on their English 10 MCAP, yet only 33.3% of Black students achieved proficiency.

During the summer of 2017, the original group began the work of designing a school-based detracking program and decided that the initial aim was to remove barriers

[4] The names of the school buildings have been changed to a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of staff and students.

to enrollment in advanced coursework by providing all 9th and 10th grade students with the opportunity to participate in Honors English 9 and 10 courses. Among the first steps was creating the CHS Detracking Team, which was composed of fifteen teachers and one building administrator. After reviewing the Honors enrollment data, student achievement data, and school climate data, the team identified the following problem of practice regarding educational tracking and performance of Black students: *Tracking causes a poverty of learning where students are receiving a separate but not equal learning experience.* The team determined that a structural change to how students are assigned to English Honors level courses was needed and developed the following vision for detracked classes: *Our school will create a culture of acceptance and a growth mindset as we detrack classes to create an environment for all students that supports equity and excellence in teaching and learning*. The team determined that monitoring AP enrollment would be the best method for measuring the initiative's success, setting the aim to increase enrollment in Advanced Placement English classes for Black students in the 11th and 12th grades.

Toward the end of the 2017–18 school year, the team decided to initiate the program by detracking all 9th and 10th grade students through the strategic distribution of students who were recommended by their previous year's teacher to be in Academic-level courses into the following Honors courses: English 9, English 10, Biology, and United States History. The team designed a proportional scheduling model that was used to assign students to detracked courses. Using this model, the majority of students assigned to a specific Honors course were those who had been recommended for Honors and a smaller proportion of assigned students were those who had been recommended for an

Academic-level course in the same subject area. The intent was to maintain a small ratio (about 5:1) of higher-needs students to typical Honors students.

Teachers from each of the four content areas noted above were offered professional development by the CHS Detracking Team members during the summer of 2018 and throughout the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years. The professional development consisted of book studies and PLC team collaboration time. The content of the professional development focused on the detracking principles established by the team using Robert Berry's (2018) National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) President's Message, which were defined as follows:

1. Shifting beliefs about who is capable of doing and understanding core curricula.
2. Teaching focused on equitable instructional practices.
3. Access to rigorous curricula that supports students' intellectual, cognitive, and cultural diversities.
4. Building classroom communities where students and teachers feel safe and supported to engage in meaningful learning.
5. Incorporating targeted and effective support for students and teachers.

Similar to Rubin's (2006) recommendations to improve teacher capacity for teaching heterogeneous groups of students, the Detracking Team also implemented the following supports for teachers at CHS:

- Summer professional development on best practices for heterogenous teaching
- Monthly detracking meetings on focused topics (Building Classroom Culture, Routines, Grouping and Scaffolding)
- Monthly peer observations
- Book study on Burris and Garrity's (2008) *Detracking for Excellence and Equity*
- Support from Core Lead Teachers and Instructional Specialists

- Daily collaborative team meetings for Honors English 9 and 10 teachers
- CCPS all-staff equity trainings to foster cultural awareness.

Teachers also continued to complete yearly Lead Higher surveys, as described under the section on causal factors, to rate their perceptions of rigor and student engagement in their classrooms. Students also completed yearly Lead Higher surveys to determine their learner characteristics and to identify "missed" potential AP students.

The detracking initiative at CHS described above continued from the 2018–19 school year to 2023-24, even during the period of virtual learning related to Covid-19 school closures. However, due to the disruption of normal instruction and assessments during virtual learning, there is currently no formal assessment data to share regarding student growth. However, there has been promising growth in students' MAP assessments.

***Detracking Initiative at BHS*.** The BHS staff began a similar pilot detracking program for English 9 and 10 Honors at the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year. BHS is a neighboring school to CHS and decided to implement its own grassroots detracking initiative after learning about changes made at CHS. In that school year, BHS had a population of 1067 students. 23.1% of its student population is considered Economically Disadvantaged (ED), 10.8% are students with disabilities, and 17.8% are Black. In 2019, 82.7% of all students were proficient on their English 10 MCAP, yet only 66.7% of Black students achieved proficiency.

In 2019, the BHS administration reached out to the CHS Detracking Team and asked the team to present to a group of staff members in their building. CHS team members shared a presentation outlining how the Detracking Team was formed and how

the staff was prepared to teach in a detracked model. BHS then implemented its own detracked classes for English 9 and 10. The CHS staff were neither involved nor consulted during the 2020–2021 implementation. However, at the end of the 2020–21 school year, BHS decided to end the detracking initiative and revert to the Academic/Honors model. Currently, there is no information about what the BHS model looked like nor what professional development and support participants in the detracking initiative received during the planning and implementation phases of the detracking. In addition, the reasons for beginning and ending the initiative were unknown.

Detracking Initiative at MHS. Detracking at the third high school, MHS, began at the beginning of the 2021–22 school year and is and continued into the 2023-24 school year. MHS is another neighboring high school to CHS and also became interested in beginning its own initiative after learning about the experiences at CHS. In 2021, MHS had a student population of 1384. 8.6% of its student population was considered Economically Disadvantaged (ED), 5.9% were students with disabilities, and 17.8% were Black. In 2019, 74.4% of all students were proficient on their English 10 MCAP, yet only 56.8% of Black students achieved proficiency.

Before implementing detracking, the MHS administration engaged all staff in conversations around equity and access using support from central office administration. The MHS administrators also provided professional development on best instructional practices for heterogeneous classes. At the beginning of the 2021–22 school year, MHS detracked all English 9 and 10 classes. While the model continued throughout that school year, little was known about the implementation details.

Using Implementation Drivers to Assess Success of the Detracking Initiatives

Interestingly, three separate high schools in CCPS chose to implement similar detracking initiatives with little data or formal guidance. The future of similar detracking efforts in CCPS is unknown; detracking efforts at CHS and MHS are still in progress while detracking at BHS ended after one year. Understanding the experiences of teachers in these three high schools as they attempted to implement a major structural change to coursework provides an opportunity for CCPS and other school systems to better engage and support teachers during the implementation of other reforms beyond detracking. Therefore, I intend to explore the similarities and differences among the three high schools to better understand how teachers experienced the implementation process and their perceptions of how they were engaged and supported during that time. I used implementation evaluation models developed by Fixsen and colleagues (Fixsen et al., 2016) and the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) to frame my investigation.

The Fixsen Model. Fixsen et al. (2016) created a model for understanding and assessing how systems develop and sustain infrastructure and practices that support sustainability and positive outcomes for new practices and policies, such as detracking. The implementation model defines specific drivers needed to successfully support instructional changes to benefit students (NIRN, 2022). They are:

1. **Competency Drivers**: mechanisms to develop, improve, and sustain one's ability to implement innovation intended to benefit students.

2. **Organization Drivers**: mechanisms to create and sustain hospitable organizational and system environments for effective educational services—that 'enabling context' we discussed earlier.
3. **Leadership Drivers**: focus on providing the right strategies for different leadership challenges. These leadership challenges often emerge as part of the change management process needed to make decisions, provide guidance, and support organizational functioning.

According to Fixsen et al. (2016), the three implementation drivers interact with one another to influence the performance assessment (i.e., data demonstrating the program's success). Figure 13 illustrates how the three drivers are integrated.

Figure 13

Implementation Drivers

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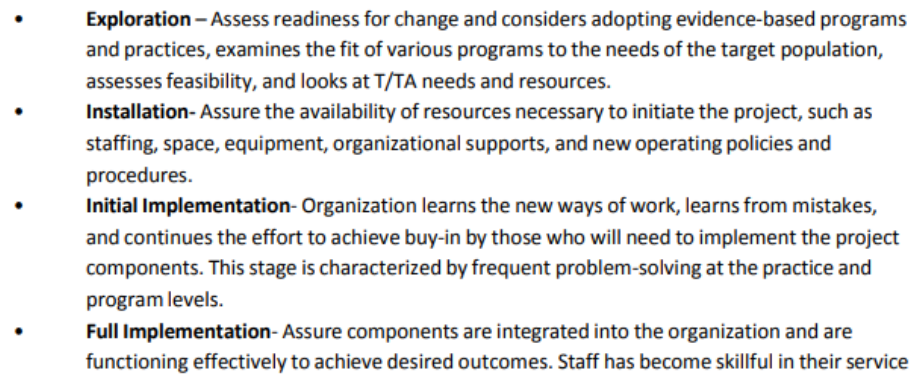
Fixsen et al. (2016) also share that implementing new initiatives goes through four distinct stages, described below in Figure 14. When evaluating an initiative, such as detracking, it is important to determine the current stage of the program.

Figure 14

Fixsen's *Four Stages of Implementation*



- **Exploration** – Assess readiness for change and considers adopting evidence-based programs and practices, examines the fit of various programs to the needs of the target population, assesses feasibility, and looks at T/TA needs and resources.
- **Installation**- Assure the availability of resources necessary to initiate the project, such as staffing, space, equipment, organizational supports, and new operating policies and procedures.
- **Initial Implementation**- Organization learns the new ways of work, learns from mistakes, and continues the effort to achieve buy-in by those who will need to implement the project components. This stage is characterized by frequent problem-solving at the practice and program levels.
- **Full Implementation**- Assure components are integrated into the organization and are functioning effectively to achieve desired outcomes. Staff has become skillful in their service

For the purpose of this study, I will examine how a select group of English 9 and 10 teachers who participated in the detracking initiative in each of the three CCPS high schools were engaged and supported during the initial implementation of their school's detracking implementation. Using the Competency Drivers (Selection, Training, Coaching, and Fidelity), I will explore and attempt to further understand the activities that each school implemented in order to develop, improve, and sustain teacher capacity and commitment to teaching in a detracked classroom. I intend to compare and contrast the activities in the three schools to gain a better understanding of what challenges were encountered and what or who may have facilitated CHS and MHS in sustaining the initiative, while BHS ended the initiative after one year. In the following section, I provide details about the proposed study.

Section 2: Study Methods

As argued in the previous section, a detracked curriculum model where all students experience an Honors level coursework has the potential to break the cycle of inequitable access to rigor and improve achievement for Black students, a group of students who are disproportionally placed in lower-tracked courses. Furthermore, exposure to and success in more rigorous coursework may lead to increased enrollment in AP courses and successfully passing AP exams. To increase and sustain a detracking initiative such as those implemented in CHS, BHS, and MHS, it is important to explore how teachers experienced the changes in practice with the view of understanding how to improve and continue detracking in the entire district.

In this study, I drew upon the Fixsen implementation model (NIRN, 2022), which provides a framework for examining an initiative's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Below, I identify Fixsen's competency drivers and explain how each was used to frame my study:

- Fidelity Assessment: Refers to measuring the degree to which teachers feel successful teaching a detracked English 9 and 10 class as intended. It answers the question, "*did we do what we said we would do?"*
- Selection: refers to the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of English teachers who have the skills and ability to teach in a detracked setting or who are trainable and coachable.
- Training: Defined as purposeful, skill-based, and adult-learned informed processes designed to support English teachers in acquiring the skills and information needed to teach in a detracked setting.

- Coaching: Defined as regular, embedded professional development designed to help English teachers teach in a detracked setting as intended.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this comparative qualitative study was to investigate how English 9 and 10 teachers in three different high schools in one school district were engaged and supported throughout the implementation of a school-based detracking initiative. I determined this by examining the teachers' perceived successes and challenges during the implementation of the detracking initiative.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my comparative case study:

1. What were the similarities and differences in how three high schools within a single district involved, trained, and supported their teachers in designing and implementing the detracking program in their building?
2. Were teachers able to communicate the purpose of the detracking program in their school building?
3. How did teachers value and support detracking as implemented in their school buildings and share a commitment to the program's success?
    a. How did a lack of teacher commitment to detracking, if it was evident in a school building, contribute to the program's failure?
4. To what extent did teachers feel successful teaching in a detracked classroom?
5. What challenges and successes did teachers perceive as resulting from participating in a detracked classroom? And who or what activities supported the implementation?

Significance of the Study

This investigation's findings have the potential to impact the longevity of a detracking initiative by helping school and district leaders understand the training and support needed to sustain such a program. Findings also have the potential to identify key areas for improvement and change ideas. Using the Fixsen model, a research-based implementation model, to guide the study allowed for a more focused data analysis, which helped to provide usable, precise recommendations regarding selection, training, and coaching for teachers.

Study Design

My rationale and design for this qualitative comparative case study is explained in the following section. According to Yin (2009), case studies are the preferred methodology when one wants to examine the *how* and *why* behind a phenomenon. With this methodology, I was able to explore how teachers were selected, trained, and coached for the detracking initiative and how this affected their perceived successes and challenges in teaching in a detracked setting.

Balbach (1999) asserts that a case study approach is ideal for program evaluation when a program is unique, implemented in different settings, and has unique outcomes. Since this detracking initiative was a grassroots program with unique features in three school buildings within a common district, there was much to be learned through this approach. Each school (CHS, BHS, and MHS) served as its own case for this study, and these cases were studied both individually and across all three cases. Balbach states that a case study is the best way to answer the "*what happened?"* question. By taking a comparative case study approach, I was able to compare and contrast what happened in

regard to teacher selection, training, and coaching in three different high schools that implemented detracked English 9 and 10 programs. This allowed me to learn the unique experiences of each teacher, as well as building and systemic experiences.

I began my study by interviewing individual teachers to understand how they participated in the implementation of detracking in their building and how they perceived their successes or challenges in teaching in a heterogeneous setting. A comparative case study approach allowed me to cover three axes of comparison during my interview analyses to gain a deep understanding of teacher experience: 1) horizontal, 2) vertical, and 3) transversal. Horizontally, I compared teachers' experiences with detracking across three schools connected through one school system. Vertically, I examined the scale of the detracking initiative at each building. Moreover, transversally, I examined the teacher experiences regarding detracking across time as each initiative began at different times (Bartlett et al., 2017). CHS, the first school in CCPS to implement detracking, began in 2018, BHS began and ended their detracking program during the 2020-21 school year, and MHS began its implementation in 2021. This approach allowed me to understand the similarities and differences of teacher experiences in the three buildings. Once conclusions were identified through an analysis of individual teacher interviews, I then compiled a focus group of interview participants across all three buildings to discuss these conclusions and provide further insight. The focus group allowed participants with a range of viewpoints and experiences to convene and discuss how they felt the emerging conclusions related to their own experiences, deepening my understanding of the teacher experience during the initial implementation phase of detracking. The focus group also provided valuable insight on my interview and document analyses and addressed

misunderstandings. In the section below, I provide a detailed overview of each phase of the study.

Methods

Phase 1: Participant Selection

I focused my study on teachers' experiences because I believe that a teacher's perception is their reality. Also, since teachers are the ones who ultimately implement instruction, their commitment to detracking and working to make it successful in the classroom is critical to the program's success.

For this reason, I began my study by selecting and inviting English teachers who taught English 9 and 10 at CHS, BHS, and MHS during the initial implementation phase of detracking to participate in individual interviews. The pool was comprised of a range of 15-18 English teachers (5-6 per school), based on the sizes of the teams and my knowledge of how many teachers were involved in the detracking planning and implementation at each school. The detracking initiatives at all three schools focused on 9^{th} and 10^{th} grade Honors English. For this reason, I used purposeful sampling to select and invite all English teachers who taught these grade-level English courses during their school's initial implementation of detracking. To identify the potential participants, I contacted the English department chair (also known as a Core Lead) in each high school. This person is both a teacher and an instructional coach. Therefore, Core Leads were also invited to participate in the study, since all three were involved in the initial implementation of the detracking program. I also invited teachers for interviews who were involved during the initial implementation year of detracking at each building, many of whom also participated in the initial planning and training for the program.

Again, I depended on the Core Leads to help me identify these participants through their own knowledge as well as using eSchool database software to examine teachers' past assigned courses.

Recruitment and Final Selection of Teachers. Since I worked as an English Core Lead before my time as a building administrator, I had direct contact with the English Core Leads in each of the three high schools in Cooper County Public Schools. I directly emailed the Core Leads and requested the personal email address of each potential participant currently employed at their school. Some of the teachers who participated in implementing detracking retired or moved to other districts. However, I was able to access their personal emails and invited them to participate. I emailed each participant individually to introduce the study, describe the purpose and method, and explain that the study was being completed as part of the fulfillment of a Doctorate of Education at the University of Maryland. I also described the selection process for participants and noted that, although participation is voluntary, participants would be compensated with a $25 Amazon.com gift card. To honor confidentiality, I shared that the information collected would be for the researcher's dissertation and that the identities of all interview participants would be protected to the maximum extent possible under the law. The emails also stated that all information obtained during the interviews would be de-identified during analysis, and no information that would potentially identify a specific individual or school would be reported. All findings would be reported in the aggregate, and individual comments would only be used anonymously as examples of a common idea or theme. I requested that recipients of the email respond directly to me to indicate their interest in participation or ask further questions.

When a teacher agreed to participate in the interview, I sent a follow-up email with a range of possible dates and times to conduct the interview via Zoom. Interview sessions were confirmed through email communication and a Zoom meeting invitation for a virtual interview. A reminder email was sent the day before the interview session. An electronic consent form was sent with this email reminder, and teachers either submitted a hard copy of their consent form or emailed a scanned copy of their form prior to the interview. See Appendix B and Appendix C for copies of all emails.

Interviews. The interviews aimed to obtain insight into the teachers' perception of training and support, or lack thereof, provided during the various implementation phases of detracking. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions as needed. I developed an interview protocol consisting of questions with probes to fit within one hour. The first interview question asked teachers to share background information regarding their teaching experience and current position. Teachers were then asked to describe their role as detracked English teachers, with probing questions regarding how, if at all, they changed their instruction and assessment approaches. Teachers were then asked to share what they considered the "look-fors" of a successful detracked classroom. Finally, they were asked to share how they were trained, if at all, to teach in a detracked classroom and whether or not they felt prepared for the initiative. These questions were developed using the Fixsen implementation model (NIRN, 2022) to examine teacher perceptions of their school's detracking initiative's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. The questions were designed to assess teacher perceptions regarding Fixsen's competency drivers of

Fidelity Assessment, Selection, and Training. The initial interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

***Conducting the Interviews*.** Each interview was conducted virtually using the Zoom video conferencing platform. I began each interview with a brief overview of the purpose of the study and the interview to provide background and purpose. Each participant had an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification regarding the purpose and timeline of the study. I asked permission to record using Zoom and review the confidentiality procedures. All interview participants consented to my recording the interview. While I intended to use the interview guide to help maintain a structure for the interview and ensure that all questions were asked of each person, the interviews also included a free-flowing discussion and allowed participants to elaborate or expand on items. At the conclusion of each interview, I emailed a transcript of the interview to the participant and asked that they send any new thoughts or clarifications within one week of receipt. I also requested that they send any training documents or supplementary materials they mentioned receiving during our interview, which was completely optional to do.

Phase 2: Document Review

At the conclusion of each interview, teachers were invited to share any training and support materials they received during the initial implementation phase of detracking. Since this was a grassroots initiative, each school developed its own school-based training materials, so it was important to include a review in the analysis and case study. I also examined supplementary materials that teachers accessed on their own. During the interview, I had asked teachers to share to what extent they felt both the training and

supplementary materials prepared them, if at all, for the implementation of detracking in their classroom. Afterwards, I examined the materials, if provided by the teacher, as well as their interview responses to make any pertinent connections. My examination of this data helped me to better understand the training and support provided to teachers during all phases of implementation.

Phase 3: Analysis and Constructing the Case Study

Analytic Memos. According to Phillips and Carr (2014), analytic memos offered me the opportunity to document my thinking and reflect throughout the data analysis process. I used analytic memos after each interview to identify emerging patterns and conclusions across schools as they related to Fixsen's Competency Drivers. The analytic memos were in a narrative format and reviewed during a final analysis of interviews and the construction of the case study (see Appendices G-J).

I began analysis at the conclusion of my interviews and document analysis. Analysis of interviews began with transcribed recordings as all interviews were transcribed by the researcher using Zoom.

Analyzing the transcripts in collaboration with the analytic memos allowed me to compare and contrast teacher perceptions regarding their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative in their school building. I used Fixsen's (2008) Competency Drivers as I analyzed data and ultimately made recommendations regarding teacher's selection, training, and coaching during the critical initial implementation phase of detracking. I then broke down the horizontal, vertical, and transversal findings for each Fixsen Competency Drivers: Fidelity Assessment, Selection, Training, and Coaching. During my analysis, I also compared and

contrasted the findings of each research question in relation to each school through a vertical, horizontal, and transversal analysis. Vertically, I examined the scale of the detracking initiative at each building based on teacher experiences. Horizontally, I compared the types of Fidelity Assessment, Selection, and Training that took place across three locations connected through one school system based on teacher experiences. Furthermore, transversally, I examined the teacher's experiences regarding detracking across time as each initiative began at different times (Bartlett, et al., 2017).

I used a constant comparative method to note the similarities and differences between data in relation to teachers within a building as well as teachers across the district. I then used open coding to group sets of information that represent similar ideas and concepts. Throughout the analysis process, I used member checking to test my emerging findings with participants. Member checking was done by providing participants with interview transcripts and asking them to read and provide any comments or corrections. Participants received the transcript within one week of the interview and were given one week to respond with any questions or clarifications.

Phase Four: Focus Groups

Once emerging conclusions emerged through the data coding, I convened a focus group of 10 previously interviewed participants across all three buildings. Only four teachers previously interviewed did not participate in the focus group. The purpose of this focus group, which took place on Zoom, was to have teachers discuss their reactions and thoughts on the emerging conclusions discovered through my interview analysis. Information from the focus group was used to develop the three axes of comparison (horizontal, vertical, and transversal) to gain a deep understanding of teacher experience.

I ensured that the focus group consisted of at least one representative from each building and that participants with a range of viewpoints (i.e., those with mostly positive and those with mostly negative experiences) were represented in the meeting. Upon the start of the focus group, three participants suddenly cancelled due to unforeseen scheduling conflicts, so I allowed those participants to attend a second focus group to capture their thoughts. That means that the first focus group consisted of seven teachers, and the second group consisted of three. Fortunately, the participants on both focus groups represented the three different buildings and were able to engage in a deep conversation, which helped with my analysis. During both focus groups, teachers discussed emerging conclusions around fidelity assessment, selection, training, and coaching as they related to the experiences within their own buildings, leading to a deeper understanding of the programs' strengths and weakness as they were implemented in the different settings. Prior to convening my focus group, I familiarized myself with my findings and group dynamics. Participants were sent the focus group guidelines and emerging conclusions to review three days prior to the meeting. I served as the moderator and began the 60-minute virtual focus group by introducing the purpose of the group, which helped to set the stage and provide context for the participants. I also established ground rules for the discussion, such as encouraging respectful dialogue and asking participants to avoid interrupting one another.

Once the introduction was complete, I transitioned to the main discussion portion of the focus group. After displaying the emerging conclusions for each driver via a shared Google Slides screen, I gave participants three minutes to silently reflect on the question, "What are your initial reactions to these conclusions?" By creating this open-ended

question, I was able to generate a semi-structured yet organic conversation regarding the conclusions.

During the discussion, I continued to facilitate conversation and ensure that all participants had an equal opportunity to contribute by asking follow-up questions to clarify participants' statements or to encourage further exploration of a particular point. At the end of the focus group, I summarized the main points discussed and asked participants if there was anything else they would like to add before the session concluded. At the conclusion of the focus group, I transcribed the meeting recording. I then analyzed the data collected during the focus group and to identify common themes or patterns that emerged from the discussion.

Phase Five: Analysis of Focus Group

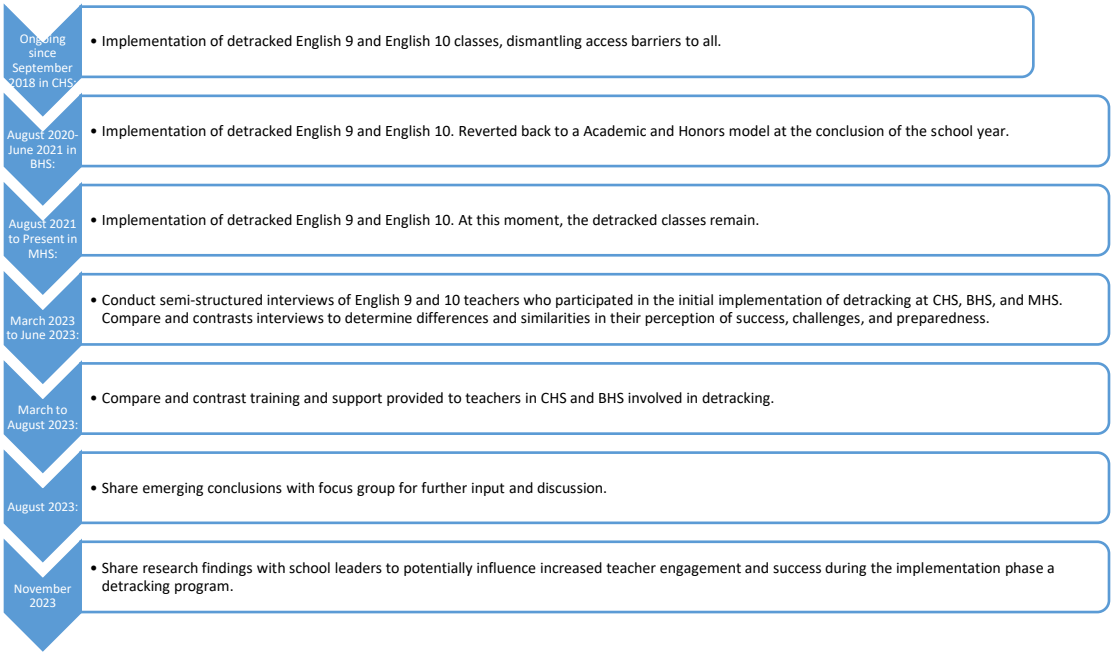
At the conclusion of the focus group, I analyzed the data collected from the focus group discussion, allowing me to further understand teacher perceptions regarding their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative in their school building. Similar to the Phase Three analysis, I used Fixsen's (2008) Competency Drivers to analyze and refine my recommendations regarding teacher's selection, training, and coaching based on the data received in the focus group discussion. Most notably, the focus group analysis provided further horizontal findings as I created a platform for teachers to share their experiences with each other that took place across three locations connected through one school system based on teacher experiences. At this point, I used selective coding to connect my categories into one central category, representing the core idea behind my grounded theory.

Timeline

Between March 2023 and June 2023, I conducted and analyzed semi-structured interviews with 14 detracked English teachers to determine their perceptions of preparedness and success, as well as the challenges they experienced in the initial implementation of their detracked classroom. After each interview, I created analytic memos to synthesize information to find differences and commonalities among the three school buildings as well as individual teachers. During the interviews, I requested training and supplementary training materials from the teachers. From March to August 2023, I examined and analyzed these training and support materials provided to teachers in the three different high schools. I studied data from the interviews and the analysis of training materials for emerging themes, patterns, and trends to better understand teacher perceptions of preparation, successes, and challenges during the initial implementation phase of the detracking initiative. I then analyzed how the information learned from teachers connected to Fixen's Competency Drivers of Fidelity Assessment, Selection, Training, and Coaching and discovered conclusions. In August 2023, I shared these conclusions with a focus group of past interviewees for further comment and discussion. Eventually, research outcomes and recommendations will be shared with school leaders to potentially influence increased teacher engagement and success during the implementation phase of a detracking program.

Figure 15

Study *Timeline*



Reliability, Validity, and Generalization

Due to the nature of my previous position (Assistant Principal who supervised teachers within CCPS), it was critical that I consider how to reduce both researcher bias and respondent bias. Currently, I am employed as a classroom teacher in a different school district, which helped to balance power dynamics in the interviews and focus group session. Most teachers interviewed were never under my supervision and taught in buildings outside of my own. Of those who were under my supervision, most had either retired or moved into different positions outside of my previous one. This left only three participants who were ever under my previous supervision and are currently teaching in the same building. Furthermore, I utilized the strategies below to ensure greater reliability and validity:

- I took detailed notes and used recording devices and transcription software.
- I used peer debriefing in the form of regular check-in conferences with a university peer to assess the study from an objective, yet critical, perspective. The peer helped to reduce researcher bias through these regular check-ins by identifying limitations and potential biases.
- I established reliability of data by comparing responses from the focus groups and the individual interview responses.
- To reduce respondent bias, I used member checking by providing participants with their interview transcripts and asking them to provide any necessary comments or corrections. I also did this with focus group participants at the conclusion on the focus group session.
- To ensure validity, I shared a follow-up document of emerging conclusions with the focus group participants to ensure that the interpretations gathered were accurate to the participants' meanings.
- I audio recorded each focus group and took additional notes during the session.
- I identified themes using an inductive approach.
- I ensured trustworthiness of inferences by multiple coding and member checking with focus group participants who reviewed the conclusions for validity.
- I ensured fidelity by strictly following my study design and methods. I constantly revisited my design and methods to ensure that all interviews and analyses were conducted in the same manner.

Protecting Human Subjects

I requested an expedited IRB for this research, which was approved due to the minimal risks involving human subjects (English teachers in CHS, BHS, and MHS) for individual interviews (see Appendix A).

Human Subject Review and Confidentiality

To protect the teachers at CHS, BHS, and MHS, as well as the University of Maryland, I used the following procedures to ensure that no identifiable subject data was used during this research process:

- Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and every effort was made to protect participants' identities.
- Participants completed a consent form prior to their individual interview.
- Individual schools were not identified by name or location. Schools were randomly assigned as CHS, BHS, and MHS.
- Participants had access to the results upon request after the completion of the study.
- Data from the interviews was stored on an encrypted flash drive on a password-protected computer for three years before being erased.

Summary

This qualitative study used a comparative case study methodology to analyze teachers' perception of how they were supported and engaged as they participated in the initial implementation of a grassroots detracking program in three different school buildings in one district. This section detailed the purpose, design, and

methods for the proposed study. The following section shares the results, analysis, and conclusions of the study, as well as the potential for this study to be replicated in other districts in the state.

Section 3: Study Findings

This qualitative study was guided by five research questions: (1) What were the similarities and differences in how three high schools within a single district involved, trained, and supported their teachers in designing and implementing the detracking program in their building?; (2) Were teachers able to communicate the purpose of the detracking program in their school building?; (3) How did teachers value and support detracking as implemented in their school buildings and share a commitment to the program's success?; (4) To what extent did teachers feel successful teaching in a detracked classroom ?; and (5) What challenges and successes did teachers perceive as resulting from participating in a detracked classroom? The purpose of this comparative qualitative study was to investigate how English 9 and 10 teachers in three different high schools in one school district were engaged and supported throughout the implementation of a school-based detracking initiative. The study examined the teachers' perceived successes and challenges during the implementation of the detracking initiative through both individual interviews, document analysis, and focus groups.

This section will provide an in-depth understanding of how the teachers of detracked classes perceived the mechanisms used to develop, improve, and sustain the initial implementation of detracking in their school buildings. I first present the findings from the individual interview and document analyses, followed by my analysis of the focus group which consisted of several individual interview participants representing each high school. I will use the Fixsen improvement drivers of Fidelity Assessment, Teacher Selection, Training, and Coaching to frame my findings for each analysis. These

sections will be followed by practice recommendations, a discussion of the study limitations, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

Phase One: Teacher Interviews

Of the 25 detracked English 9 and 10 teachers invited to the study, 14 accepted and participated in an individual Zoom interview. Although other content areas implemented detracking in each building, this study will only focus on the experiences of English 9 and 10 teachers involved in the implementation. Figure 16 outlines the representation of teachers from each building. The column titled "Detracking Team Structures in the Building" summarizes the different content areas that were teamed for detracking. In this context, a team is defined as a group of teachers assigned to teach the same courses who are also afforded a daily collaborative planning period (in addition to a personal planning period) during the school day to plan lessons and review student data.

Figure 16

Breakdown of Interviews by Buildings

Building	Implementation Overview	Overview of Interview Participants	Sex and Race of Participants	Teaching Experience	Involvement in Initial Implementation	Detracking Teaming Structures in Building
BHS	Initial implementation in 2019 and ended after one school year	Three teachers interviewed; of the group two were teacher leaders	Two were female and one was male. All three teachers interviewed were White.	All three teachers taught for 10 years or more	All three teachers participated in the initial implementation	BHS had three teams of detracked teachers: English 9/10, Biology, and Government
CHS	Initial implementation in 2018 and presently continuing in 2023	Seven teachers interviewed; of the group, two were teacher leaders	Six were female and one was male. All seven teachers interviewed were White.	Five teachers taught for 10 years or more; two teachers taught 1-3 years	Six teachers participated in the initial planning and implementation ; one joined during the first year of implementation	BHS had three teams of detracked teachers: English 9/10, Biology, and Government. US History and English 11 were also detracked but not provided a team or collaborative planning
MHS	Initial implementation in 2021 and presently continuing in 2023	Four teachers interviewed; of the group, one was a teacher leader	Three were female and one was male. All four teachers interviewed were White.	Two teachers taught for 3-5 years; two teachers taught for 10 years or more	All four teachers participated in the initial planning and implementation of the program	MHS only had one team of detracked teachers: the English 9/10 team.

Each interview lasted about one hour per teacher, and every teacher participated via Zoom. I scheduled the interviews via email, providing participants with multiple options for meeting times. Once I finalized the interview date, I sent the participants Google calendar invites. All participants attended their individual interview at the scheduled time. Below are some impressions from my analytic memos of each schools' interviews:

- At BHS, all three teachers each had over ten years of experience. They were not particularly engaged in their interview and each required more follow-up questioning and prompting. All three had negative views of the initiative and struggled to remember details about its initial implementation.
- At MHS, half of the teachers interviewed (2 out of 4) had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers interviewed had 3-5 years of teaching experience. In general, each of the MHS teachers was eager to share their experience and cooperated throughout the interviews.
- At CHS, five out of the seven teachers interviewed had been teaching for more than ten years. Two of the veteran teachers interviewed were also teacher leaders in their building. They two teacher leaders expressed excitement when discussing the initiative. The two novice teachers (with under 3 years of experience) were cooperative but not as excited about the detracking initiative. They both expressed feelings of being overwhelmed which came through body language and their verbal responses.

Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The individual interviews were first analyzed by school building using the Fixen Competency Drivers: Fidelity Assessment, Selection, Training, and Coaching. For each driver, I start with a vertical comparison (teacher perceptions within each building), then using the findings by building I report a horizontal comparison (teacher perceptions across all three buildings), and finally I report a transversal comparison (teacher perceptions across time) by the timing of the initiative implementation. I will share emerging conclusions for each driver at the end of these comparisons.

Teacher Perceptions of Fidelity Assessment

According to Fixsen et al. (2016), Fidelity Assessment refers to measuring the degree to which teachers feel successful teaching a detracked English 9 and 10 class as intended. It answers the question, "*did we do what we said we would do?"* For example, CHS began its detracking program with the following vision: *Our school will create a culture of acceptance and a growth mindset as we detrack classes to create an environment for all students that supports equity and excellence in teaching and learning*. Ultimately, the purpose of the detracking initiative is to benefit students and should be measured by student success; however, this study will examine the degree to which teachers felt successful teaching a range of learners in the detracked setting.

Vertical Comparison

In this section, I will explore the degree to which teachers felt successful teaching a detracked program within each building. It is important to note that each school did not establish success measures for the detracking initiative, which would have helped teachers develop a more concrete understanding of their success. Instead, this study will analyze the degree to which teachers felt successful through their daily experiences in the detracked classroom.

BHS. In this building, all three teachers interviewed felt that the implementation of detracking was unsuccessful. Two of the teachers expressed both staff and personal skepticism about the need for the initiative prior to its implementation, with one of them sharing that, as a teacher leader, "I remember launching [the detracking initiative] to everybody and there were some real naysayers and it was a very difficult [initial

implementation] year" (Teacher D). The other teacher who expressed skepticism stated, "there's a lot of data that shows detracking does not work. It's just another fad that our school wanted to try" (Teacher E).

Although all three teachers believed that classroom management was less of a problem in the detracked class compared to a typical academic level class, all also felt ill-equipped to engage their high performers and meet the needs of their lower performing students. Teacher E summarized her colleague's feelings of inadequacy with reaching all learners with the statement, "I think the teachers just felt really stressed and…like it was impossible to do right by anyone." Similarly, Teacher D felt that her colleagues did not feel successful due to their lack of buy-in from the beginning of the detracking program. Teacher D's observation coincides with Synder's (2017) findings that teachers who feel that an initiative is happening *to* them rather than a shared reform happening *with* them often feel increased stress and marginalization. This issue was compounded because the school closures related to the Covid 19 pandemic began during the implementation phase of detracking in BHS. Students had to participate in learning through virtual instruction, and, according to the teachers, many low performing students had other family requirements they needed to meet during the school day that led them to missing instruction. All three teachers found it incredibly challenging to provide the necessary differentiated instruction through a virtual classroom.

One teacher leader interviewed in BHS (Teacher D) said that she did feel successful in her detracked classroom because she had taught the course for several years and was highly motivated to keep the course rigorous for all learners. Teacher D stated that she was able to reach all learners and shared a specific example of a special

education student who was moved to Honors English 10 “who probably never would've moved up to honors English if [the student] hadn't been in the co-taught Honors class [a detracked class with special education students and a special educator]. But it was like, I don't know, something happened. It was great” (Teacher D).

According to Teacher E, all teachers detracked English teachers on her team adopted a new way to measure student performance through individual growth rather than how well students were meeting the same standards. Teacher E believed that the focus on growth allowed the teachers on her team to see success in all students, even if they did not all achieve at the same levels. Teacher E further explained that as part of the attempt to measure growth, she created an improvement grade rubric where students examined an earlier writing piece alongside a current piece. Students would then self-assess their improvement between the two writing pieces. Teacher D also shared that, as a teacher leader, she noticed that her team of detracked English teachers changed their approaches to assessing learning through growth measures as a result of the detracking initiative: “[the team] started to have conversations about students who might be frustrated by not meeting the standard and how [the team] could scaffold our assessments so these students could see their growth and build confidence.” Teachers D and E’s adjustment of their grading policies aligns with Oakes et al.'s (1992) finding that teachers who offer alternative ways to demonstrate mastery teach students how hard work contributes to learning, an important component to a successful detracked classroom.

Ultimately, however, the detracked English teachers at BHS shared with school leaders that they no longer wanted to detrack, which they attributed to increased planning for teachers and a slowing down of the curriculum for high-achieving students. Teacher E

stated that, by the end of the school year, her team felt that "[Detracked English teachers were] not really doing right for these kids that are struggling, and [detracked English teachers] are also not doing right by the kids who need us to stimulate them and push them." Teacher E also shared that her detracked English team considered the previous model of academic and honors courses to be improving student achievement as measured through their school's English 10 MCAP data, so they decided to end the detracking initiative after one year. It is important to note that English 10 MCAP was not administered during their initial implementation year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so Teacher E is referring to MCAP scores prior to implementation. Those interviewed also shared that, although student behavior improved, instruction did not. Teacher D shared, "I didn't really have the behavior issues, but I had different very big academic challenges…but then the question is, do we wanna make instructional decisions based on classroom management?" In general, all three teachers interviewed in BHS did not believe that the detracking initiative had accomplished what it was set out to do.

The failure of BHS's detracking initiative can be best explained by Mehta and Cohen (2017) and their characteristics of a successful school reform effort. According to those teachers interviewed, most BHS teachers did not initially believe there was a problem that needed to be solved, which hindered their commitment to the program's success. Further, they believed they were not offered the instructional tools, training, and guidance needed to implement detracking in the classroom. Without these key components, the program was unable to sustain momentum after one school year.

CHS. Interviews with the seven English 9/10 teachers at CHS revealed differences of opinion about the success of detracking between the veteran teachers and

the two novice teachers. The two veteran teacher leaders interviewed indicated that they felt competent in the detracked classroom and stated that both high achievers and students who required more support showed growth. These teacher leaders both demonstrated the qualities of "deeper" teachers which, according to Mehta and Fine (2019), are necessary to a successful reform. "Deeper" teachers carry the role of facilitator of knowledge and see their students as creators of knowledge. For example, Teacher G discussed how she fostered learning through instructional activities that included collaborative grouping, team problem solving, and choice assignments. Further, she explained how she measured for growth rather than mastery by stating, "I'm going to base their grade off the fact that they tried to the best of their ability and grew from their previous work." In fact, five out of the seven CHS teachers expressed a shift from measuring student achievement against one set of specific expectations or outcomes to measuring student growth, leading them to believe that most students made tremendous growth in the detracked classrooms. Teacher K shared that, "[the English 9/10 team] looked at…where the kids were and tried to make goals based on…a rubric or checklist…for them to reach." Teacher B, a veteran teacher who also piloted the program, shared that, "I really dug in to figure out how I can support all these students and it stretched me as a teacher because it made me look at things through different lenses." Teacher B captures Mehta and Fine's (2019) belief that "deeper" teachers create seminal learner experiences for all their students.

Conversely, the two novice teachers interviewed shared feelings of failure in the detracked classroom, with Teacher C stating that, due to the challenging behaviors and range of learners, "I feel like I'm babysitting most days. I don't feel like I'm teaching."

Teacher I, another novice teacher, shared her frustrations with classroom management and the extensive time with planning instruction. This teacher also felt that she was not giving enough attention to the high achieving students nor providing the neediest students the support they required, stating that, “Trying to differentiate for a much broader scope of students required just a tremendous amount of work to be able to do it well, and because of class sizes, I often felt that the kids who needed the most help were not getting it.” Both novice teachers shared that turnover in school leadership contributed to their feelings of frustration. Teacher C voiced that the current school leaders did not understand the purpose of the initiative and how to best support teachers. Holme and Rangel (2012) found that schools with a high turnover in leadership often struggle with engaging teachers in a reform because they do not have the established relationships necessary to co-construct the reform.

Participation in collaborative planning seemed to help the CHS English teachers who were interviewed feel more successful in the detracked classroom. Six out of seven teachers associated their dedicated planning time each day to their feelings of success, with one novice teacher stating, “I feel supported. I feel engaged with ideas. I have time to think and learn from my peers. It is vital to my success” (Teacher K). Conversely, Teacher F, a veteran special education teacher not assigned the collaborative planning time, reported that she felt disconnected from planning for the detracked classes. She also felt as though she was expected to do what the general classroom teacher told her to do, which left her with negative feelings and a sense of dissatisfaction. She stated, “It's been more ‘this is what, this is what you're going to do…you need to go into this classroom…this is what you need to do.’ I don't feel there's been a lot of support.” These

perceptions of success and failure align with Oakes et al.'s (1992) assertion that detracked teachers require a dedicated collaboration time to make meaning of best instructional practices and their implementation in the classroom. Additionally, Mehta (2015) shares that successful reform efforts prioritize collaboration so that teachers engage in a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. It is evident in this building that collaboration has increased teacher feelings of success.

All teachers interviewed at CHS also reported feeling inadequate at being able to implement detracking alongside a recent CCPS inclusion initiative, introduced to reduce the number of special education students in exclusionary settings. Teacher C discussed how she feels overwhelmed with the Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) plans she is asked to implement as part of the inclusion initiative as well as the differentiated instruction she must plan for her detracked classrooms. She stated, "I feel like no one can explain the difference between detracking and inclusion…and it's really confusing." Teacher B, a veteran teacher leader, also believed that the disconnection between detracking and inclusion was leading to teacher frustration. She shared:

> I think the district could have done a better job showing the alignment between the two initiatives…like making a shared vocabulary. It seems like they are competing against each other, and the teachers just need more consistency with the information.

MHS. This high school was the most recent adopter of detracking and was beginning its third year of implementation at the time of the interviews. Teachers in this building expressed mixed feelings about the success of the model. All four of the teachers stated that they were frustrated that some of their colleagues who were teaching in a

detracked setting were not engaging in the process of changing their teaching practices to fit into a detracked classroom. Based on the interviews in this school, it was apparent that the teachers' attitudes prior to implementation contributed to their feelings of success or failure after the first year. For example, Teacher J shared that some colleagues had a defeatist attitude prior to implementation: "It comes down to attitude. [Some teachers have] a positive attitude, like, 'Let's try it and we can make it work.' Whereas some of my other colleagues [thought that] if we try this, it's gonna fall apart and…it's gonna ruin the fabric of society forever." This data supports Oakes and Lipton's (1992) findings that detracking requires a teacher's rethinking of fundamental educational norms, which can create tension if not properly addressed prior to implementation.

Similarly, poor teacher mindsets seemed to negatively affect the collaborative planning time. All four MHS teachers interviewed shared that they often felt tension between teachers during collaborative planning, which contributed to some teacher perceptions of poor student performance in the classrooms. Teacher H shared that:

> Unfortunately [team planning] should have helped support detracking but everyone was so frustrated and confused that we didn't know how to help each other. [The meetings] turned into more like trying to battle frustration versus what we could do better.

Three of the MHS teachers interviewed discussed how inclusion and the CCPS inclusion specialist often attended their collaborative meetings, and they felt the focus was more about reaching special education students than all students. Teacher H reported that:

> The inclusion specialist talked to [the detracked English teachers] in January…We were very frustrated because a lot of new special ed terminology

was coming at us. We were being told we're responsible for SDI. We didn't really understand what SDI meant. So our stress level was really ratcheting up.

All teachers interviewed also shared that the detracked model required much more planning than previously had been needed with Teacher H stating, “In academic [classes], [English teachers in non-detracked setting] differentiated and it was maybe two levels that we were looking at, not five or six different levels of…skills. So the biggest learning curve for me was how to manage that all in one class period.” Half of the teachers interviewed also revealed that they adapted to using a growth model when it came to assessing student outcomes by measuring students based on personal growth. All teachers also reported that student behaviors were easier to manage in detracked classrooms than in a typical academic classroom.

Horizontal Comparison

In this section, I will explore the degree to which teachers’ responses about successful detracking compared across all three high schools. One commonality between all buildings was that most veteran teachers reported a decrease in disruptive behaviors in their detracked classes compared to a typical academic level class. Another commonality was that most veteran and novice teachers reported that they had shifted their grading practices to a growth model where they measured improvements in each student's performance, and all found this successful. The veteran teachers from BHS and CHS also had more positive perceptions of their success teaching in the detracked classrooms as they may have more instructional tools to use and adapt during instruction.

In all three schools, novice teachers expressed frustration over the amount of time it took to plan lessons to reach all learners. Even after putting in the time to create these lessons,

these novice teachers reported feeling that they were not able to meet the needs of both their high achievers and low achievers.

Teachers from both BHS and MHS discussed the importance of teacher mindset prior to implementation. These teachers reported that their colleagues who had a negative perception of detracking prior to implementation did not feel successful with their students, like a self-fulfilling prophecy. This was best summarized with the following teacher's statement:

If a teacher goes in and already is not a fan [of detracking], he's going to tell you, 'I don't know what to do with these kids.' But he's already come in with the attitude that this isn't going to work. And that to me is a big problem. (Teacher L)

Transversal Comparison

In this section, I will explore the degree to which teachers felt successful teaching a detracked program across time based on the timing of their implementation and when they were interviewed. As a reminder, the schools implemented detracking in the following order:

- 2018: CHS implementation of detracking
- 2020: BHS implementation of detracking
- 2021: MHS implementation of detracking

The timing of the detracking initiative implementation seems to have had an effect on teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness. At BHS, the teachers implemented detracking the same year that school was interrupted by the pandemic and moved to virtual and hybrid learning. During this frustrating time in education, teachers felt unsuccessful in the detracked model while trying to help students who were home on computers. Teacher D

shared, “it probably went most downhill when it started to go into the hybrid model and…you couldn't tell if there was a pulse anywhere.” Due to the teachers’ frustrations and the disruption of instruction, the BHS administrators decided to revert to their previous model of honors and academic classes the following school year.

In the two other buildings (CHS and MHS), teachers’ interviews indicated that many were frustrated and confused about the differences and similarities between detracking and inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Over time, the introduction of inclusion, which eliminated traditional co-teaching models that left one classroom teacher responsible for instruction, led classroom teachers to feeling overwhelmed and unsuccessful in the detracked classes. It remains to be seen if detracking at CHS and MHS will survive the compounding frustrations and issues attached to the inclusion initiative.

Conclusions Identified Around Fidelity Assessment

An analysis of teacher experiences regarding their perceived successes and challenges among these buildings reveals the following conclusions:

- The focus on measuring student growth over mastery helped teachers focus on meeting students where they were and setting goals. Measuring growth was reported by teachers as giving them a greater feeling of success with their detracked classes. Rather than focusing on standardized assessments, which often assess “who is smart and who isn’t” (Oakes et al., 1992, p. 449), the detracked teachers who feel successful focus on develop life-long learners who are curious, capable creators of knowledge (Mehta & Fine, 2019).

- A positive teacher mindset prior to implementation appeared to contribute to feelings of success. Teachers shared that proper training and a clear explanation of detracking's purpose allowed them to feel more positive as they started the initiative. Teachers reported feeling frustrated by colleagues who began the initiative with negative feelings and refused to change their instructional approaches.
- Veteran teachers were much more likely to feel successful in the detracked classroom due to increased experience with differentiation and scaffolding.

Teacher Perceptions of Selection

According to Fixsen et al. (2016), selection refers to the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of teachers who have the skills and ability to teach in the desired setting (in this case, a detracked classroom) or who are trainable and coachable. There is not enough interview data to support a thorough vertical, horizontal, and transversal analysis of teacher selection because teachers reported that school administration simply used the teachers previously assigned to English 9 and 10 courses. The high schools did not have the luxury of hiring and selecting teachers who would best "fit" a detracked model when initiating the program. However, two teacher leaders interviewed (one from BHS and another from CHS) did reveal some important insights. One interesting finding was that, in both BHS and CHS, the administration had a small number of teachers pilot the model prior to implementation. This strategy allowed those schools to safely work out details and observe successes and challenges before presenting the model to staff. Both pilot teachers in each of the two school buildings reported positive experiences with detracking their classes. Piloting detracking may also have provided positive momentum at the start

of implementation and may have helped with teacher buy-in for most teachers. However, it did not seem to change the perceptions of those teachers who were against detracking from the beginning. Since there is not enough data for further analysis, no conclusions will be discussed regarding selection.

Teacher Perceptions of Training

According to Fixsen et al. (2016), training is defined as purposeful, skill-based, and adult-learned informed processes designed to support teachers in acquiring the skills and information needed to teach during an initiative. For this study, training will be specifically defined as any support and information given prior to the initial implementation, or before teachers began teaching detracked students. On the other hand, coaching, which is discussed later in this section, will be defined as support and information given during the initial implementation, as teachers are in the process of teaching detracked students. Appendices H-J include snippets of data from each building regarding training before the detracking implementation.

Vertical Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perception of the scale of the processes designed to help teachers acquire the skills and information needed to implement detracking within each building.

BHS. To initially implement detracking, the teachers shared that their building used a training approach in which a group of teachers piloted the detracking initiative for one school year with the idea of these teachers would then provide training to colleagues in subsequent years. Prior to the pilot implementation, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) read and discussed Burris and Garrity's (2008) *Detracking for Excellence and*

Equity as a means of developing a purpose and understanding for the initiative. Even though the instructional leadership team (ILT) agreed to pilot detracking, the teacher leader (Teacher D) interviewed shared that some members of the ILT (such as other teacher leaders not implementing detracking) opposed the idea. Teacher D shared that the ILT searched for detracking-specific trainings or summits that the pilot teachers could attend prior to implementation, but none were available. This same teacher shared that she only recalled receiving a copy of *Teach Like a Champion* (Lemov, 2015) to prepare for the implementation, but did not recall a book study or discussion around this text. All teachers interviewed in BHS stated that lack of training prior to the implementation was a barrier to the program's success. Teacher N shared that training on differentiation techniques or specific detracking teaching strategies would have been helpful before teaching in a detracked classroom. She stated, "[detracked teachers] didn't have any training…it was a really big barrier. I think even just… having a book study on some differentiation techniques or some techniques to use in a detracking classroom would've been helpful."

Another issue was that the teachers involved in the pilot implementation, who were expected to later serve as trainers to their colleagues, were directed to use their team planning period to learn best practices for detracking. However, not all teachers supported detracking and were reported to be more resistant to changing their teaching practices. A teacher leader interviewed in BHS stated that she was assigned to help the teachers in the planning group but she found this task challenging because some of the teachers assigned to a detracked classroom were focused on their negative experiences in

the classroom. This negativity affected the attitude and productivity of the team planning. The Teacher D (a teacher leader) shared:

I remember launching it to everybody and there were some real naysayers and it was very difficult…the team [planning period] was supposed to be the PD [Professional Development]...it felt like we should have provided [the detracked teacher] with tools before they were in front of [detracked] students (Teacher D). Prior to implementation, it also appeared that teachers were not properly prepared for how to support special education students in the detracked classrooms. Teacher N shared that detracked teachers on her team believed that all special education students needed the support of a special education co-teacher, even if it was not a service on their IEP. This statement reveals that detracked teachers were functioning under varying impressions that should have been addressed in training prior to implementation. The false impression that detracked teachers were not responsible or equipped to teach students with disabilities, if addressed in training, would have helped to establish Mehta and Fine's (2019) principle for deeper learning for all that school must create an "integration of students with different skill levels rather than tracking" (p. 306).

CHS. According to one teacher leader interviewed at this school, a peer coaching model had been implemented schoolwide prior to detracking implementation. Peer coaching required teachers visiting each other's classrooms, observing practices, and providing feedback to colleagues. According to Teacher B, a teacher leader who was interviewed, the peer coaching model had established a culture where teachers were willing to try new strategies and demonstrate flexibility. Even though peer coaching was not directly related to detracking, the teacher leader stated that, prior to the detracking

initiative, "[The ILT] created a pineapple culture where [all] teachers were encouraged to pair up and do walkthroughs and observe each other and kind of like peer coaching."

The same teacher leader also shared that CHS established a Detracking Team (comprised of teacher and building leaders) prior to implementation that explored data, attended planning meetings, conducted a book study on Burris and Garrity's (2008) *Detracking for Excellence and Equity*, and developed an optional paid summer training to interested CHS teachers that focused on sharing the initiative's purpose as well as differentiation strategies. However, several of the teachers in CHS who were interviewed did not recall this training opportunity and felt that they received no training prior to detracking implementation. Teacher L recalled a 30-minute session on detracking (which appeared to be a summary of the summer training) that was conducted with staff during the pre-service days at the start of the implementation year.

Although most teachers interviewed did not recall specific training prior to the implementation, they all shared an understanding that tracking in their building was a problem that needed to be solved. Teacher G shared, "[Our school leaders] said, '[Detracking] is what we're going to try and do.' We were okay with it because we knew our [academic] classes weren't producing great results." Teacher B, the teacher leader who piloted a detracked English 9 course before initial implementation, shared that her colleagues who detracked the following year seemed more comfortable with the initiative because they saw her success in the detracked classroom and felt comfortable asking for support from her. Both examples highlight a collaborative culture where teachers felt safe taking risks. According to Hubbard and Datnow (2020), fostering collaboration,

empowering teachers to make decisions, and creating a safe space for teachers to take risks must be pre-established for an initiative to find success.

MHS. This building implemented detracking later than the other buildings, and the interviewees shared that the training for detracking became muddled with the district's implementation of inclusion, which occurred at the same time. One problem, according to all the teachers interviewed, was that it seemed to them that detracking and inclusion had different definitions and expectations for teachers, almost as if they were in competition with each other. Teacher H shared that:

> Over the summer [before implementation], [detracked English teacher] received a three-hour crash course [on detracking] …[the training] was helpful because it described the purpose of the detracking and why we were moving in this direction. What wasn't helpful was there weren't a lot of strategies given on how to handle [detracked classroom]. But then, when school started, we didn't have co-teachers in our room like we were used to, and then we started learning about inclusion.

Additionally, two of the teachers interviewed felt that, since not all team members attended the optional training, it was difficult for everyone to have a shared understanding of the detracking initiative's purpose. One teacher leader shared that little training was provided prior to implementation and she believed her school leaders decided to "jump in" to detracking, which made the detracked teachers on her team feel like "deer in the headlights" (Teacher A).

Horizontal Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perceptions across the three high schools of the processes designed to help teachers acquire the skills and information needed to implement detracking prior to working in a detracked classroom.

According to teacher leader interviews in all three buildings, the design of the initial detracking training rested with the Instructional Leadership Team within each school building. At both BHS and CHS, the Instructional Leadership Team read and discussed *Detracking for Excellence and Equity* (2008) prior to implementation. Although an appropriate resource for the initiative, the teams would have benefitted from more recent publications and a variety of resources to develop their training plan. They would have also benefitted from working collaboratively with district leaders or the other high school buildings. None of the teacher leaders interviewed indicated that collaboration outside of their ILT took place prior to implementation.

Both BHS and CHS relied on their teacher leader to pilot the program and train detracked teachers prior to implementation. At BHS, this model proved inefficient and, ultimately, unsuccessful as the teacher leader was simultaneously implementing and training teachers. She felt ill-equipped to train teachers, since it was also her first-time teaching under this model. Also, since the BHS teachers interviewed did not share a common understanding of the initiative's purpose, they reported that their team planning time was used to vent frustrations rather than learning. A complicating factor is that the teacher leader also was unsure of which training materials would best support the team. At CHS, the teacher leader appeared to have more success with training other detracked English teachers. This teacher leader was able to pilot detracking the year before training

her colleagues, and it also appeared that CHS teachers interviewed understood there was an issue with student underperformance in academic classes and were more willing to take instructional risks.

Only CHS teachers indicated the formation of a Detracking Team that explored training options and created a clear purpose. The CHS teacher leader interviewed indicated that the team was comprised of teacher leaders and building leaders, and they attended a state training that supported constructing school change initiatives. Both CHS and MHS teachers indicated that their buildings offered an optional summer training prior to implementation. Unfortunately, no CHS or MHS teachers indicated that the summer training prepared them to teach in a detracked setting.

Transversal Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perception of the processes designed to help teachers acquire the skills and information needed to implement detracking across time. As a reminder, the schools implemented detracking in the following order:

- 2018: CHS implementation of detracking
- 2020: BHS implementation of detracking
- 2021: MHS implementation of detracking

All three BHS teachers interviewed did not report receiving training prior to the implementation, and the initiative appears to have started soon after a decision was made by the Instructional Leadership Team. Once implemented, COVID-19 affected training and support as teachers moved to virtual instruction during the middle of the school year. This complicating factor contributed to the ending of detracking after one school year.

According to teacher interviews, CHS appears to have taken the most time to plan for the initiative's training. Once the decision was made to implement detracking and a Detracking Team was formed, the initiative began one year later, after the team had a teacher leader pilot a detracked English class, developed its purpose, and offered summer training opportunities.

All MHS teachers interviewed did not report receiving training prior to implementation unless they were able to attend the optional half-day summer training. At both CHS and MHS, teachers reported that an optional summer training did not guarantee attendance from all detracked teachers and did not cover the instructional strategies needed to implement detracking. At MHS, the timing of the detracking initiative overlapped with the inclusion initiative, which seems to have complicated the training and support needs for teachers.

Conclusions Identified Around Training

An analysis of teacher experiences regarding training and support among these buildings reveals some common conclusions that should be considered:

- Teacher involvement in developing the initiative matters. The detracking effort appeared more sustainable at CHS because teachers were given a voice with the program's development and training model prior to implementation. According to Hubbard and Datnow (2020), teacher involvement in a change effort allows them to function as co-creators, and this shared reform technique creates a strong commitment to an initiative's success.
- Establishing a clear purpose with shared definitions for the initiative is important. A lack of shared understanding of detracking and its purpose created barriers to

teacher growth and development as they prepared to implement the initiative. Moreover, teachers reported a lack of consistent language and expectations across all buildings, which they felt created teacher confusion and eventual resentment. According to Fixsen et al. (2016), staff must be provided with the knowledge related to the history, theory, philosophy, and values of the program.

- Provide clear and consistent training materials to teachers prior to the implementation. Teachers reported that each building created their own training and materials, which led to inconsistent implementation among buildings. According to Fixsen et al. (2016), staff must be provided with opportunities to attain new skills, practice them, and receive feedback in a safe and supportive training environment. In all three buildings, teachers were expected to implement detracking with little to no training and no opportunity to practice and received feedback prior to implementation.
- Avoid competing initiatives. Teachers expressed confusion and frustration regarding detracking and inclusion, which are two different initiatives. Teachers stated they were unclear about how the initiatives interacted with each other and felt that supervisors and building administrators could not explain the difference to them. Beaudan (2006) cautions that staff can undergo "change fatigue" when they feel that competing initiatives are both diverting their attention away from and weakening their energy to engage in a change effort.

Teacher Perceptions of Coaching

According to Fixsen et al. (2016), coaching is defined as regular, embedded professional development designed to help teachers implement an initiative as intended.

For the purpose of this study, coaching will be differentiated from training in the following way: coaching is the support and information provided to teachers once the implementation has begun whereas training is any support or information that was provided prior to the start of the implementation.

Vertical Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perception of the embedded professional development and coaching designed to support teachers during the initial implementation of detracking within each building while teachers were in the process of teaching detracked classes.

BHS. Teacher D, the teacher leader interviewed from this school, described her role as an instructional coach for the detracked English 9/10 teachers involved in the initial implementation phase. She led a daily team meeting where she provided teachers with support as they planned their detracked lessons. The teacher said that she found it challenging to coach teachers as they were overwhelmed by the challenges and oftentimes wanted to vent rather than plan, and she was the sole instructional coach tasked with supporting detracked teachers. She stated, “I was alone, and everyone [on the collaborative team] was really negative.” To further complicate her position, the teacher leader was also asked to lead other content areas in detracking, even though she was only an expert in her English content. She shared, “I was helping [detracked science teachers] and…trying to give them tools and ways to make modifications. But they really weren't wanting to receive that feedback.” She shared that she expressed to administration that it was not sustainable for her to coach teachers outside of her English content in detracking.

Teacher N shared that coaching became more complicated when teachers moved to virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated, “there was a new issue with not only detracking but also teaching online. And it was impossible to collaborate because we were all at home.” She also believed that team meeting was not productive because teachers used the time to socialize and vent as they were at home without much human interaction.

CHS. All CHS teachers interviewed who were provided with a daily team planning period (six of the seven teachers) cited team planning time as their primary means of coaching and professional development once the initiative began. These same teachers shared positive perceptions of their team planning, which they attributed to strong teacher leadership and a culture of shared learning. Three CHS teachers shared that, during their team planning, they were open to receiving feedback and learning from their colleagues’ successes in the classroom, with Teacher G stating that:

> [Collaborative planning] is an extremely important piece because it gives you time to, as a team, look at student data for your classroom, but also holistically to see what is working and might not be working in your classroom. [The teachers on team planning] are always having a discussion about what’s going well and how are we doing that, and then maybe doing a walkthrough in their class to see how they're doing it. Team plan is huge.

A novice teacher (Teacher C) built upon the importance of team planning and a strong instructional leader by citing team plan as her primary support through a difficult year of implementation. She also shared that team planning shifted her mindset from measuring mastery to measuring growth. She stated:

> [Team] planning is so helpful because...our core lead…is a genius when it comes to how [the detracked English teachers] can backwards plan—from what we need the students to achieve, to the steps we can take…to help them learn this skill or…content. And then we're like, 'How do we take [the lesson] and create easier access for a student who might not be able to write 500 words?'…The collaboration part, like talking out the assignments, trying new ideas, developing different types of lessons, giving each other feedback on how they worked. It's amazing.

Two of the CHS teachers interviewed also shared that their ELA Supervisor provided training that allowed them to scaffold their lessons and use concepts such as determining *what must students do*, *what students could do*, and *what students can try* when developing a lesson. Teacher C shared the following:

> [The ELA Supervisor and Learning Specialist] teach us how we can approach [a lesson] with different learners in mind. Our [ELA] professional development has focused on different types of strategies that we can use to incorporate different types of learners or non-traditional learners, which was more focused on inclusion but was really helpful in detracking as well. The [ELA] trainings provided have been super helpful. They really did help me a lot.

One negative aspect of coaching came from an interview with one veteran special education teacher leader who stated that special educators were not consistently assigned to the team planning period, which weakened their understanding of and confidence in detracking. She stated, "I don't think there's been a lot of coaching, and I am receiving different information from [building] administrators and my [special education]

supervisors." This statement speaks to the lack of communication between building and system leaders regarding detracking and the disconnection teachers who are not assigned a team planning can feel in a detracked classroom.

Besides the daily team planning and ELA Supervisor support, Teacher B (a teacher leader) shared that after-school professional development sessions were provided to the teachers in detracked classes, as well as book studies during the first year of implementation. She stated that the Detracking Team used strategies from *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* (Lemov, 2015). Teachers were taught a strategy and encouraged to conduct peer walkthroughs to give each other feedback on the strategies. No other teachers interviewed mentioned attending the after-school sessions, which may be due to the amount of time that has passed (the sessions took place in 2018).

MHS. Once the school year began, all teachers who were interviewed indicated that their coaching focused more on inclusion and reaching the needs of their special education students in their classes. All teachers interviewed appeared to express more concerns with lack of inclusion coaching than detracking coaching because, traditionally, classroom teachers had a co-teacher (who was also a special education teacher) assigned to them during certain class periods. This teacher would work alongside the general education teacher each day.

With the simultaneous introduction of detracking and inclusion, teachers expressed struggling to navigate their new responsibilities to students with IEPs that were assigned to their classrooms while reaching all other learners in a heterogeneous, detracked setting. Teacher H shared that team planning seemed unproductive because it was hard for colleagues to move forward due to these frustrations, and they preferred to

spend time venting them rather than work collaboratively to develop lessons. A teacher leader interviewed shared that some teachers could not move beyond the idea of having "those kids in the room" (Teacher A) and were unwilling to be coached in different instructional approaches. Teacher A, a teacher leader, shared that she felt uncomfortable challenging her colleagues' mindsets because:

> I'm a teacher leader, but I'm still just a teacher. How can I have these difficult conversations with my colleagues? I'm definitely not a know-it-all. But at the same time, I have a lot of experience with varying levels of ability where some of them may not.

As a result, she asked for support from inclusion specialists, administrators, and content supervisors. Teacher H indicated that, eventually, team planning sessions focused primarily on their IEP students, and detracked teachers gained a deeper understanding of how to support special education students. While not directly linked to detracking, Teacher H described how the team would closely read a student's IEP and develop a lesson based on that student's needs. She found it very helpful in moving forward with planning for student needs, something she believed was missing from the initial training. Teacher J indicated that she found weekly co-teacher planning and working with the teacher leader to develop lessons to be very helpful. However, working with the co-teacher was optional and, based on my interviews, it appears that not all teachers were interested in this approach, which was done outside of regular teaching hours.

Horizontal Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perception of embedded professional development designed to support teachers during the initial implementation of detracking across all three buildings.

A consistent finding from my study was the need for daily collaboration with a strong teacher leader. The supportive, collegial environment of the CHS team planning described by the teacher interviews captures Hallinger's (2003) concept of a transformational leader, one that provides individualized support, a shared vision, and a positive culture. Teachers on the CHS team reported that regular coaching allowed them to make meaning and create scaffolds with current lessons. BHS and MHS seemed to have less productive collaborative meetings because teachers were distracted by their frustrations and unable to move to a coachable place. The teacher leaders on these teams were put into a difficult situation because teachers were not probably trained in the purpose of the initiative, so they lacked commitment to its success. Unfortunately, the detracked teachers in this building had the perception that this initiative was happening *to* them rather than *with* them (Synder, 2017). Compounding the issues was that teachers were juggling to different initiatives as they learned to detrack: BHS was learning how to function in a virtual environment (an unforeseen initiative due to COVD-19) and MHS was learning how to balance the demands of detracking and inclusion.

Transversal Comparison

In this section, I will explore teacher perception of the embedded professional development designed to support teachers during the initial implementation of detracking across time. Over time, the most consistent form of coaching has been by a teacher leader

during collaborative team planning. Teachers who do not participate in team planning report feeling unsupported and unprepared to implement detracking. The timing of competing initiatives, an unforeseen one at BHS and a planned CCPS special education initiative, made coaching a challenge for teacher leaders as they were tasked to manage teacher frustrations.

Conclusions Identified Around Coaching

An analysis of teacher experiences regarding coaching among these buildings reveals some common conclusions that should be considered:

- Teachers benefit from regular collaborative planning run by a teacher leader. Most teachers reported that in-the-moment coaching from a colleague who is also teaching in a detracked setting helped them feel successful. The feelings of collegiality and a shared vision among their team helped to support more open mindedness and flexibility. This concept is also supported by Mehta (2015) who suggests breaking down the isolation of teaching by making collaboration a priority, as teachers work to examine data and revise teaching practices using a "plan-do-student-revise cycle" (p. 281).
- A pre-established collaborative culture helps to support positive experiences during initial implementation: Teachers who were previously engaged in peer coaching and walkthroughs prior to implementation seemed more comfortable showing vulnerability and working collaboratively as they implemented detracking. This positive culture also works to develop was Mehta and Fina (2019) define as "deeper teachers." These teachers see their role as a facilitator of knowledge and their students as creative, curious, and capable creators of

knowledge. The work to "create seminal learning experiences that would affect their students beyond the specific content of the course: they tried to plant seeds that might inspire many years of inquiry into their subject" (p. 352).

Phase Two: Document Analysis

Upon completion of each interview, teachers were invited to share training materials they received during the initial implementation phase of detracking. Most teachers were unable to produce detracking-specific materials. However, teachers did share two texts that were used: *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* by Doug Lemov and *Detracking for Equity and Excellence* by Burris and Garrity (2008). Another teacher shared that he attended virtual inclusion trainings run by Katie Novak (2020), an education consultant regarding inclusive practices, Universal Design for Learning, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. An analysis of these three sources led to the following conclusions:

- *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* (2015)*:* This text provides teachers with concrete and specific strategies to increase engagement and learning and is broken into four sections: (1) Check for Understanding, (2) Academic Ethos, (3) Ratio, and (4) Five Principles for Classroom Culture. The book provides "ready to use" techniques, which teachers can often appreciate. However, the book does not specifically address the needs of a heterogenous, detracked classroom. This text was only used at CHS, and only the teacher leader who organized the training around this text mentioned it in the interviews, revealing that the training did not stick with teachers and has not been revisited since the initial implementation.

Furthermore, the teacher leader reported that this training was optional and held after-school.

- *Detracking for Equity and Excellence* (2008)*:* This text is an experience-based and research-supported argument for detracking. The author, who implemented detracking in her school district, shares the process that was used and reports on the success of the program using data. The limitation of this resource was used in CCPS is that the reading and discussing of the text was only done by the school's instructional leadership team, not the teachers who implemented detracking. Participation from teachers may have increased buy-in and a deeper understanding of the program's purpose.
- *Novak Educational Consulting, Inc.* (2020)*:* Katie Novak shares an educational framework centered around Standards-Based Lesson Design and Universal Design for Learning Lesson Plans. The issue with these trainings is that they are marketed as "inclusive practices," and teachers report being told that "detracking" and "inclusion" are not the same. These materials and their use in a detracked classroom seem to compound teacher confusion regarding this issue.

Unfortunately, these training materials fall short of the major ideological shifts that must take place in order for detracking to achieve sustainability. According to Hubbard and Datnow's (2020) call for schools to serve as beacons of innovation, with teachers working collaboratively to design instruction tailored to their students' needs. The training materials shared reflect a traditional, teacher-led instruction model. Burris and Garrity's (2008) work is too outdated to guide today's educational challenges. Moreover, Lemov's (2015) text is based on teacher control and traditional

classroom structures, both proven by Hubbard and Datnow (2020) and Mehta (2020) to not work with today's learners. Novak's (2020) work seems to further complicate the murky differences between inclusion and detracking, thus creating more teacher frustration.

Phase 3: Focus Group

All interview participants were invited to participate in a focus group regarding emerging themes which were developed after an analysis of interviews and training materials. The purpose of the focus group was to establish validity for my interpretations of the individual teacher interviews and expand my interpretations as I was able to observe from across the three building teachers discuss detracking. Due to cancellations from participants, two separate focus groups were held online (via Zoom) to maximize participation. Focus Group 1 included seven teachers representing all three school buildings. Focus Group 2 included three teachers representing BHS and MHS. The focus group was structured so that teachers were presented with emerging conclusions that I drew from my analysis of the interviews related to each of the four Fixen Competency Drivers. They were then given three minutes of silent reflection before engaging in a conversation regarding their reactions and thoughts on the emerging conclusions.

Focus Group Discussion of Fidelity Assessment Conclusions

Prior to the focus group, participants only had access to their own interview transcript as well as a list of the emerging conclusions (which were emailed one week prior to the meeting). Participants shared a general agreement with the emerging conclusions around fidelity assessment while revealing deeper issues that were not discussed in the individual interviews. Through their discussion, the participants

emphasized the need for clear measures of success, a focus on student growth, and a supportive leadership culture. The participants expressed a desire for more feedback and recognition for their hard work and suggested various types of data can help to show teachers that their efforts are paying off. They highlighted the importance of having smaller, more definable measures for growth as this would help generate a more positive teacher mindset.

Regarding measures of success, one teacher shared an insightful comment on the need to establish clear criteria:

> I know that I was like over the moon when my MCAP scores came in because I had a bulk of these [detracked] students and I had the second highest scores in the building. So to me, that was a huge measure of success that what we were doing with detracking was working, but no one has come out and officially said that to me or to our team or to any of that. I think that's great proof that detracking worked in English. But no one has been clear about what those measures are at all. (Focus Group Participant)

After this comment, another participant built upon the idea by sharing that:

> Waiting until [MCAP scores] is too long to help with teacher mindset. You must have smaller, more definable measures as you go. And if you have someone or access to someone who has training and knowledge of how you can look for growth over shorter periods of time, it becomes much more sustainable and easier to start shifting teacher mindsets into how this is working. And maybe it's not even student, like grades or skill performance, maybe it's behavior, maybe you're

> able to do things in this detracked classroom that you couldn't in an academic classroom prior to this movement.

The comment helped to reveal the importance of data analysis as a tool for promoting teacher buy-in and motivation. Another participant also shared their belief that:

> Data helps immensely. If we can show teachers that something is working, that students are growing, that's going to help a lot. I think there needs to be a plan… that comes back to like [why we are doing this] and then… what specifically are we looking at? What are we looking for? And seeing improvement, we need somebody that can track that or some tool to track that.

The discussion helped to reveal the close connection between data analysis, teacher recognition, and buy-in. The emphasis on student performance truly surfaced during the focus group discussion. Participants felt that a detracking program's sustainability hinges on regular teacher feedback on their student performance. These concerns align with Fixsen et al.'s (2016) assertion that an implementation must use multiple data sources to measure its performance and use it for positive recognition, never as a punitive measure. If data reports an issue, that is just evidence that the quality of an initiative must be improved. Not only does data analysis have the potential to improve teacher buy-in, but it can also inform leaders of changes that need to be made to the coaching/support model.

The discussion also revealed the emergence of a new issue related to the building leadership's role in helping teachers feel successful in their detracked classroom. One participant shared that they felt it was important for "leadership in the building to be on board, doing walkthroughs and things to support teachers on a consistent regular basis"

(Focus Group Participant). Another participant built on this idea by sharing that building administrators should work with teachers in the beginning of the year on goal setting. She shared the idea that an administrator would start the school year with teachers using a framework like:

> We want to see that even our strongest students in the class are showing growth. How are we going to, what kind of data are we going to look for? We want to see that gaps are closing. Are we going to look at MAP scores? (Focus Group Participant)

She expanded on this idea by sharing that the administrator should also work to ensure balanced scheduling of detracked classes so that students with differing needs are distributed across all class sections. Administrators should also professional development for teachers in detracked classrooms. This participant concluded by saying, "You have to have somebody on [the] leadership team that understands the [initiative's] plan and tries to make it successful because just little things can throw it off." This speaks to need for intentional leaders in school buildings who are both aware of the structural needs of an initiative and work to champion it through ongoing intentional interactions with teachers that work to foster collaboration, empower teachers to make decisions, and create a safe space for teachers to take risks (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020).

Overall, the focus group discussion around the fidelity competence driver emphasized the importance of using data to promote teacher buy-in. Furthermore, the discussion focused on the importance of using a goal setting approach from the beginning of the school year to help teachers understand their student needs and the instructional changes that need to take place to meet these needs. The data should be shared and

analyzed on a regular basis to help teachers better understand the positive effects of detracking as well as measure their successes and challenges.

Focus Group Discussion of Training Conclusions

Several participants from one school noted that their team had been collaborating for several years prior to implementing the detracking initiative and that this helped them take on uncomfortable changes more easily. According to these participants, their biggest challenges were the lack of clear and consistent training and support materials and the competing initiative of inclusion.

Participants from all buildings agreed that developing a shared understanding among all teachers from the beginning was necessary before training took place. They also noted that, as new staff members join the program, they also need to be trained on the *why* before they begin teaching in the detracked classroom. As one teacher shared:

> [It] comes back the shared understanding of really why we're doing it. And when that is muddied and lost, that's when teachers aren't really buying into it. And if you don't have that [shared understanding] first, the teachers that aren't bought in, are not going to buy into the training. (Focus Group Participant)

Two participants had joined their school's staff after the start of detracking and agreed with the statement regarding the need for a shared understanding of detracking. They shared that they felt thrown into the detracked classroom without an understanding of the program's purpose and goals.

The confusion with the district's inclusion initiative was also mentioned throughout the discussion. One participant shared that:

> [How] Special Education inclusion looked after COVID was totally different. And our system didn't really support special ed and general ed teachers at all. It was just kind of like, ‘here you go figure it out.’ In hindsight, they really should have worked together to develop a plan to make it successful for both [detracking and inclusion] initiatives. It needs to start with the supervisors and work its way down, because each supervisor kind of has a different idea about detracking and inclusion. (Focus Group Participant)

Other participants agreed with this statement and shared their examples of when they received conflicting information from different building leaders and district supervisors. The participants voiced that the initiatives were both valuable but seemed to be competing against each other instead of working together.

There was disagreement among some of the participants regarding what type of training is needed for detracked teachers. Some believed that training on differentiation of instruction and inclusion would be beneficial. A few veteran teachers felt that there was no need for specific training on detracking and that educators should already know how to reach all learners through best practices. Some participants also stated that the professional development provided by their content supervisor had prepared them for success in the detracked classroom. One participant stated:

> I think [ELA teachers] have been preparing to teach in this setting for several years. Our [ELA] professional development has been focused on scaffolding our lessons so that all students have an entry point. I also think our rubrics [that focus on growth] are really helpful for building [student] capacity.

Focus Group Discussion of Coaching Conclusions

Discussion of collaborative planning generated the most excitement and positivity from the focus group participants. In general, all agreed that regular collaborative planning, led by a teacher leader, and a pre-established collaborative culture, increased positive outcomes. One participant shared that her team already had:

> an established culture, and we worked well together. It didn't mean that [all team members] necessarily liked [detracking], but…we developed some great stuff, and it was fun. But there were other teams [without a pre-established collaborative culture] who did not utilize [their time] effectively and balked every time [a teacher leader] expected them to [plan collaboratively].

Many focus group participants agreed with the sentiment that "it's hard when people don't know how to work in a collaborative team and they just assume it's just more time for them to do their thing. It's frustrating" (Focus Group Participant). These comments and the ensuing discussion appeared to solidify the importance of a collaborative culture as key to a detracked program's success. If the culture is pre-established in a school, then it becomes easier to begin challenging work without having to spend time establishing norms and building trusting relationships.

The positives of regular team planning were also emphasized throughout the focus group discussion. Teachers shared that they appreciated the time to create thoughtful lessons with their colleagues. As one teacher stated:

> …you must plan for good teaching and when you're planning for good teaching, you're planning for all learners. *How are we going to make this accessible for all of our kids? What are we going to do to make it engaging? What are we going to*

> *do to stretch some of our higher achievers?* I couldn't imagine us being as successful [with detracking] if we were isolated. No matter what you teach, whether it's detracked or not, whenever you collaborate, you're going to be stronger in general. But especially when you have a range of learners, the more ideas you have coming in the better. (Focus Group Participant)

All the participants emphatically agreed with this sentiment, sharing that they would not "survive" without the regular planning time with their colleagues.

There was also a shared belief among the participants that a strong teacher leader ensures productivity during team planning time. One teacher shared that:

> We had protocols, and everything we did was about good teaching. Our students just benefited. We started to ask, *what is it we really need students to do here and what does it look like at its base level? And what does it look like when it's stretched?* But I feel like you must have someone in the collaborative who's leading that or all that happens is it turns into a group planning session with every individual …doing what they think is best for their classroom instead of [having] these rich conversations. I can only imagine what would have happened had we not had those collaborative [discussions]. (Focus Group Participant)

Themes Emerging from Interviews and Focus Group Analysis

Much of the focus group discussion confirmed conclusions that were gathered during the interview and document analysis phase of the discussion. For instance, according to focus group participants from two of the three high school buildings, the initial implementation of detracking in English classrooms led to confusion and frustration among teachers. Teachers reported feeling frustrated by colleagues who began

the initiative with negative opinions about detracking and refused to change their instructional practices approaches. In some schools, understanding the difference between detracking and inclusion overwhelmed teachers as did the lack of training and support materials. These competing initiatives interfered with training efforts in at least one school. Training and collaborative planning became focused on strategies for including students with IEPs, and less attention was given to specific detracking practices.

Regular, embedded professional development, such as collaborative planning and coaching from a teacher leader, helped teachers feel more comfortable and supported. Daily planning appeared to be more beneficial in one school that had an established collaborative culture of peer coaching. Participants agreed that having a pilot phase with select teachers before full implementation would be beneficial, as it would allow for issues to be worked out and for respected members of the staff to share positive outcomes. They also emphasized the importance of having clear definitions of the initiative and its purpose, as well as consistent language throughout the district.

The focus group discussion did reveal some new conclusions that were not previously discovered in the interview and document analysis phase. Firstly, many of the focus group participants across all three buildings shared the need for quantitative data that helps them see student growth and feel validated for the time they use planning for detracked instruction. They also felt that data confirming student growth in the detracked setting would help with buy-in from staff and community members opposed to detracking.

Secondly, the focus group participants shared their concerns regarding a lack of support and shared understanding from building leaders. One building shared that, when they began considering the initiative, their principal was a transformational leader who worked closely with them to plan the implementation. At the start of the implementation year, that principal was replaced by a novice principal who was unaware of the initiative and did not engage in its implementation. The teachers from that building reported that the detracking was not sustainable under the new leadership, with one stating that, "the energy just totally shifted, but we had no choice but to continue with the plan for that school year." Another building shared that, after their building leader who helped to implement detracking left the school, there was not another leader who understood how to schedule detracked classes and support detracked teachers. One teacher stated, "no [leader] has sat down with [the detracked teachers] and said, '*Okay, what didn't we do right last year that we need to implement for this upcoming year?*' Which is concerning because I can't take another year like this [most recent school year of detracking]." This data reveals that, even if an initiative has a successful start, it can easily come undone without proper reflection and improvements.

One participant summarized her feelings on teaching in a detracked setting in a way that captured the general sentiment of the group. She stated:

> Detracking works, but it's not magic. I believe in it deeply. I buy into it. I like seeing students grow. But it requires a lot of planning, a lot of energy, a lot of time, a lot of collaboration with other teachers. And I think that making sure that those things stay in the forefront of things that teachers are given is so important. We can't expect teachers to carry that on their own and on their own time. I think

> that's important because otherwise everyone's going to burn out, especially with another initiative that kind of competes against it. They should work together. But because there aren't clear definitions across the system, they don't. (Focus Group Participant)

Summary by Research Questions

In this section, I will explore study findings in relation to each research question.

What were the similarities and differences in how three high schools within a single district involved, trained, and supported their teachers in designing and implementing the detracking program in their building?

There were more differences than similarities between how each building involved, trained, and supported teachers during the design and implementation phases of detracking. BHS and CHS both relied on teacher leaders to pilot detracking to identify possible issues and serve as trainers to their colleagues. In both cases, this approach did help with designing the program but showed mixed results during implementation. A lack of detracking training materials or a concrete implementation plan seemed to hinder both teacher leaders to varying degrees and, ultimately, all three buildings shared concerns with lack of consistent training. All three buildings cited a daily collaborative team meeting run by a teacher leader as their primary source of support and coaching. The success of these team meetings varied among each building as they hinged on teachers' pre-disposition toward detracking and a pre-established collaborative culture prior to implementation. A lack of clear definitions among school and system leaders also hindered teachers' feelings of preparedness and success in all three buildings.

Were teachers able to communicate the purpose of the detracking program in their school building?

A lack of shared definitions among each building made it difficult for teachers to communicate the purpose of detracking. At BHS, teachers understood that it was an equity initiative meant to provided increased rigor to all, but those interviewed shared that their colleagues seemed to philosophically disagree with the initiative from the start. At CHS, teachers demonstrated the clearest understanding of the program's purpose but felt that school and system leaders were unclear of the purpose. They voiced frustration over a recent inclusion initiative and how leaders did not seem to understand or communicate the differences between the two programs. MHS shared a similar concern, but their confusion was confounded since detracking and inclusion were implemented simultaneously.

How did teachers value and support detracking as implemented in their school buildings and share a commitment to the program's success? How did a lack of teacher commitment to detracking, if it was evident in a school building, contribute to the program's failure?

At CHS, the pre-established collaborative culture among the English 9 and 10 team strengthened their commitment to the program's success. Teachers felt safe experimenting with new teaching methods, sharing concerns, and planning collaboratively to improve student outcomes. This team experienced recent changes in leadership as well as a new inclusion initiative that presented frustrations, but the strength of the team and the teacher leader has helped to maintain teacher commitment. At MHS, teachers also seem to share a commitment to the program's success that is strengthened

through their work as a team. Conversely, at BHS, a lack of teacher commitment to the program's success led to its eventual demise. It appears that this English team did not have a pre-established collaborative culture, which led to a less productive daily team planning.

To what extent did teachers feel successful teaching in a detracked classroom?

Since each building did not define success measures prior to implementation, teacher success was measured based on the degree in which teachers felt they could successfully reach all learners in their classrooms. In all three buildings, teachers expressed difficulty with reaching their most needy as well as their most gifted learners. However, teachers at CHS and MHS demonstrated flexibility and a willingness to change their teaching practices to reach all learners. The support teachers receive in their daily collaborative meetings seems to provide teachers with the time and space to experiment with their practices and make necessary adjustments.

What challenges and successes did teachers perceive as resulting from participating in a detracked classroom? And who or what activities supported the implementation?

Across all three buildings, most teachers shared concerns about a lack of training and shared definitions, which led to challenges with implementation. However, in CHS and MHS, teachers felt that their daily collaborative meeting provided them with the tools needed to improve their instruction to teach in a heterogeneous (detracked) setting. Teachers in all three buildings also discussed adjusting their grading practices to measure growth rather than mastery, which helped them feel more successful with their most

needy learners. The most important support activity shared by teachers is a daily collaborative team meeting run by a strong teacher leader. Teachers felt safe to receive support from their colleagues and were able to strengthen their instructional strategies in this setting.

Future Recommendations

After analyzing the focus group findings and revisiting my conclusions developed through interview and document analyses, I have developed future recommendations that should be considered when initiating a detracking initiative. Although my long-term improvement aim was to show an increased representation of Black students in AP English courses as a long-term effect of detracking, the purpose of my study was to explore how teachers who participated in a detracking initiative were engaged and supported during their school's initial implementation.

The recommendations (which are in no particular order) below should be considered when engaging teachers in a change initiative, such as detracking, that may ask them to "challenge their entrenched views of such matters as human capacities, individual and group differences, the purposes of schooling, and the ever-present tensions between the norms of competitive individualism and the more democratic norms of support and community" (Oakes & Lipton, 1992, p. 449):

- Create a shared understanding among staff regarding detracking and its purpose prior to implementation. Teachers must establish an understanding and, even more important, a commitment to detracking before teaching in a detracked setting. According to Mehta and Cohen (2017), teacher must feel that the initiative is solving an existing problem and believe it will help students.

- Identify and review clear measures for success that focus on student growth to promote teacher motivation and buy-in: Teachers benefit from quantitative data that shows student growth. Furthermore, teachers should work with building leaders to review data regularly, setting goals and reflecting on their successes and challenges. Leaders should regularly take time to recognize teachers for their efforts and successes. According to Fixsen et al. (2016), data review is a critical piece to implementation success. Data should be used to inform changes and not as a punitive measure. Teachers need to know if their efforts are creating student growth. If they are not, they need support in changing their approaches.
- Consider piloting the program with select teachers prior to initial implementation: A small program pilot allows for buildings to work out potential issues and may increase teacher buy-in if a respected member of the staff can share positive outcomes. Further, providing teachers with leadership opportunities will ensure that they are valued as co-creators of the change efforts (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020).
- Create a district-wide vision/plan for detracking that involves central office staff: This vision and plan should be regularly shared with leaders and teachers. A special emphasis should be placed on familiarizing new staff members with this plan prior to teaching in a detracked setting. The discrepancies in implementation strategies between buildings led to confusion and frustration among staff. According to the CCPS Equity Plan (2016), the district was dedicated to “increase participation of individuals from underrepresented groups in advanced academic

programming" (p. 3). If that is the case, then district and building leaders would have benefited by making detracking a collaborative effort.

- Build time in the master schedule for collaborative planning with a teacher leader: Teachers repeatedly shared that collaborative planning helped them feel prepared and successful in the detracked classroom. It is critical that this time is facilitated by an instructional leader who creates a safe space for teachers to work collaboratively. According to Hubbard and Datnow (2020), fostering collaboration, empowering teachers to make decisions, and creating a safe space for teachers to take risks must be pre-established for an initiative to find success.
- Establish a building leader who is committed to the program's success: Detracking is a major shift for most teachers. There must be a building leader who ensures the balancing of student needs among classes, helps teachers set goals, manages data collection, organizes professional development, and provides regular feedback and praise to detracked teachers. Alkema (2020) further supports the need for leaders to demonstrate empowering behaviors during organizational changes and deter passive mismanagement and active interference behaviors, which will deter team members from committing to changes. Therefore, it is critical that detracking takes place in schools where teachers are valued as co-creators of the change effort and view their school leaders as supportive and collaborative (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020).
- Avoid competing initiatives or find ways to have them work together: If detracking is new to a building, leaders must understand the time and attention that it will require to be successful. Additional initiatives have the potential to

overwhelm staff and increase the likelihood of burnout. If additional initiatives are unavoidable, then leaders must work collaboratively to find commonalities among the programs. Clearly communicate the similarities and differences to teachers, and whenever possible, look for ways to reduce the mental overload teachers may be feeling. Beaudan (2006) cautions that staff can undergo "change fatigue" when they feel that competing initiatives are both diverting their attention away from and weakening their energy to engage in a change effort.

- Consider detracking more than an initiative but rather a restructuring of the traditional grammar of schooling. These findings reveal that detracking, when perceived as an initiative, faces the same challenges as any program perceived as another "quick fix" by educators. Instead, we must rethink the concept of detracking in relation to the "grammar of schooling," the long-established institutional structure of schooling, which is slow to change and often poses challenges to innovation (Tyack and Tobin,1994). In a society that is rapidly changing, detracking should be considered an important restructuring that better aligns with today's learners, rather than just another initiative.

Recommendations for Future Research

An interesting dilemma that presented itself through both interviews and focus group discussions is one of proper training for detracked teachers. The participants had different ideas around this topic, some feeling that specific detracked training was necessary and others finding that solid pedagogical strategies were simply enough. Some participants expressed a feeling of unpreparedness to teach in a detracked setting, naming a lack of training as the issue. However, it appears that no specific "detracking training"

exists. Some believed that training on differentiation and inclusion would suffice while others felt it was not enough.

Along the same lines, further research should examine the definitions around detracking, examining what common language staff should use during initial implementation. It seems that, among the different buildings and even between school and central office leadership, staff had different definitions for the detracking and its purpose.

Lastly, future research should examine the concept of detracking as an initiative versus an approach to structuring a school building. Throughout my research, I questioned why detracking must be viewed as an initiative that requires "buy-in" rather than an approach to educating students. For example, we do not label tracking as an "initiative"—it is simply the way schools are structured. This study has left me wondering how educational institutions can restructure the "de facto" segregation taking place in schools without these restructures considered to be "another initiative?"

Summary

This dissertation focused on the teacher perception of training and support they received during a detracking initiative implemented in three high schools in one school district that occurred over a period of four years. The purpose of the detracking initiative, which originally began at CHS in 2018, was to increase Black students' access to rigorous curricula, specifically AP English courses. Eventually, BHS began an initial implementation of detracking in 2019 and MHS followed a few years later in 2021. To date, CHS and MHS have continued to use a detracked structure for their English 9/10 courses. BHS ended their detracking implementation after one school year. The purpose

of this investigation was to explore the degree to which teachers involved in the initial implementation in three high schools in one school district experienced the initial implementation and felt engaged and supported during the process of changing traditional and long-existing course structures.

There were limitations to this study that could be corrected or considered in future research on detracking. Participation in this study was optional, so not all teachers who participated in the initial implementation were interviewed. Therefore, the data collected from this study may not reflect the perceptions of all detracked teachers. In the future, it is best to survey all teachers to have a better understanding of their successes and challenges.

Another limitation relates to the researcher's prior relationships with participants. Although I had left the school district and no longer supervised teachers, some teachers had a previous relationship that may have compelled them to answer in a more favorable manner. To counteract this potential limitation, I ensured that focus groups included teachers in which I had no prior relationship. I was also careful to simply facilitate the discussion and not interject, allowing teachers to let down their defenses and engage in a more natural conversation. I found this strategy seemed to disarm any potential issues.

The most notable findings include the importance of a pre-existing collaborative culture where school leaders deeply understand the purpose of detracking and collaborate along with teachers to sustain the program. Rubin (2006) believes that, once teachers commit to detracking, they will establish a learning environment that "respects and makes productive use of diverse contributions from varied learners; providing

opportunities for diverse ways of learning; providing support to individuals as needed, challenging all students; keeping learners actively involved" (p. 8).

Teachers reported feeling more successful with detracking when provided with regular, embedded professional development in the form of a daily collaborative meeting led by a teacher leader provided. In these daily meetings, the use of ongoing data collection and analysis to monitor student growth helped teachers find value in detracking and feel successful with student growth. Oakes et al. (1992), one of the first champions of detracking, emphasized that teachers need time to work collaboratively to make meaning of best instructional practices to effectively implement them in the classrooms. Further, Mehta (2015) stated that teachers are most successful when they are not asked "be implementers of ideas drawn up by others but rather active participants, working together to develop teaching ideas and solve problems of practice" (p. 280).

A major challenge for teachers was when they perceived school leaders as not honoring the intense time and effort it takes to detrack and minimizing teacher concerns around time constraints. Ultimately, detracking is most successful in schools where teachers are valued as co-creators of the change effort and view their school leaders as supportive and collaborative (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020).

Further, this study exposed a bigger issue between implementing initiatives versus restructuring schools to best suit today's learners. Years of data and research have revealed that our current educational system's approach to tracking oftentimes leaves our most vulnerable students in less rigorous classrooms with poorer outcomes, not only academically but also socially and economically. Detracking has the potential to close the educational and social gaps among White and Black students. However, the initial

implementation of detracking in a school building must be carefully planned to find success. Teachers, those on the front lines of detracking, must feel prepared, supported, and successful for the program to continue. The teachers who expressed a positive attitude toward the implementation came from school buildings that had a pre-existing collaborative culture and felt that school leaders understood the reasons behind detracking, working to champion the program. They noted that the turnover of school leaders and teachers in building led to confusion around the purpose of detracking and weakened the initiative over time.

Teachers also shared that regular, embedded professional development in the form of a daily collaborative meeting led by a teacher leader provided the support they needed to feel successful. A need for ongoing data collection and analysis to monitor student growth would also help teachers buy-in to detracking and feel successful. In general, teachers seemed to understand the importance and value of detracking but felt that leaders may not understand the time and energy needed to create lesson plans that reach a variety of learners. Furthermore, they felt that initiatives that may be able to support detracking, like inclusion, were instead perceived as competing due to lack of communication and collaboration from school and system leaders.

These findings reveal that detracking, when perceived as an initiative, faces the same challenges as any program perceived as another "quick fix" by educators. Instead, we must rethink the concept of detracking in relation to the "grammar of schooling," the long-established institutional structure of schooling, which is slow to change and often poses challenges to innovation (Tyack and Tobin,1994). In a society that is rapidly

changing, detracking should be considered an important restructuring that better aligns with today's learners, rather than just another initiative.

MSDE's Blueprint for Maryland's Future (2023) offers promising policy changes that align with the restructuring needed to sustain a detracking initiative. The creation of teacher career ladders will allow high performing teachers to:

> Remain in the classroom where they are most effective and also to increase their impact and expand their reach by spending more of their working time leading their peers in professional development, identifying and tutoring the students who need the most support, and improving instruction for all students at their school. (Blueprint for Maryland's Future, 2023)

Providing teachers with leadership opportunities will ensure that they are valued as co-creators of the change efforts (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020). Furthermore, with teacher leaders involved in instructional planning, school reform will feel less top-down and more like a shared reform (Synder, 2017). The Blueprint also proposes increased teacher salaries, enhanced teacher preparation, and more job-embedded professional development. Such practices will not only attract more people to the profession, but it will also develop educators who are both well-paid and well-trained, and hopefully more adept at participating in school reform.

Appendix A: *IRB Approval Letter*

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
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irb@umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE:	January 19, 2023
TO:	Catherine Sutton
FROM:	University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1991602-1] ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS THROUGH THE INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF A DETRACKING PROGRAM
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	January 19, 2023
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # 7.

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to final approval of this project scientific review was completed by the IRB Member reviewer.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate Amendment forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix B: *Invitation to Participate in Study*

Dear (detracked English teacher),

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase understanding of teachers' perceptions of their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative in their school building. This study is the final requirement to complete my Doctorate of Education program through the University of Maryland. As an English teacher who participated in the initial implementation of detracked English 9 or 10, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your perspective. The interview takes around 45–60 minutes and will follow a semi-structured protocol, meaning all participants will be asked the same questions but will also have time to provide extended input. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the training and support you have received for detracking. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interviewee will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and writeup of findings.

However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and my findings could lead to training and support for your colleagues. You will be compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card for your participation. If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you, and I will do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thanks!

Sincerely,
Catherine Sutton, Doctoral Candidate
Doctorate in Education

Appendix C: *Follow-up to Invitation to Participate in Study*

Dear (detracked English teacher),

This is a follow-up email regarding my request for your participation in my study regarding detracking in your school building.

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase understanding of teachers' perceptions of their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative in their school building. This study is the final requirement to complete my Doctorate of Education program through the University of Maryland. As an English teacher who participated in the initial implementation of detracked English 9 or 10, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview takes around 45–60 minutes and will follow a semi-structured protocol, meaning all participants will be asked the same questions but will also have time to provide extended input. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the training and support you have received for detracking. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interviewee will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and writeup of findings.

However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and my findings could lead to training and support for your colleagues. You will be compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card for your participation. If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you, and I will do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thanks!

Sincerely,
Catherine Sutton, Doctoral Candidate
Doctorate in Education

Appendix D: *Interview Protocol*

Introductory Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today's interview. To aid with notetaking, I would like to record our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only the researchers of this study will have access to the recordings, which will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form designed to meet our human subject requirements. This document states that: (1) all information will remain confidential; (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable; and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as an English teacher who participated in the initial implementation of detracked English 9 or 10. The purpose of this study is to examine how English 9 and 10 teachers in your building perceived their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative. The results of this study will provide helpful insight to school leaders on the training and support needed for the implementation phase of a detracked program.

At the conclusion of this interview, I will ask if you have any detracking training materials you received during the implementation phase as well as any supplementary materials you used to prepare to teach in a detracked setting. If you have any materials you would like to share, please email them to me within a week of this interview.

Within one week of today, I will email you a transcription of your interview. You are invited to review the transcription and provide any feedback, clarifications, or further information. Please respond with this information within one week of receiving the transcription.

You will also be invited to attend a follow-up focus group meeting. During this meeting, you will be able to discuss the emerging conclusions discovered in my data analysis with other teachers who have participated in a detracking program implementation. You will be able to provide further information, clarifications, and thoughts during this time. Participation in the focus group is voluntary.

A. Interviewee Background

How long have you been…

_____ in your present position?

_____ at your building?

1. Tell me about your teaching background and experience.

2. Why did your school begin the detracking initiative?

3. Describe your role as a detracked English teacher.

    a. Probes: Did the detracked classroom require you to change your teaching or assessment practices? If so, in what ways? Were you able to continue teaching as you had before?
    b. What year(s) were you a detracked English teacher?

4. Did you receive any type of training prior to the initiation of detracking? If so, what kind of training?
    a. Probes: What did you find most helpful about the training? Why?
    b. Least helpful? Why?
    c. Do you have any training materials you would like to share with me?

5. What would you consider the criterion or "look-fors" of a successful detracked classroom?

6. What resources and support are or were available to detracked teachers during the school year? Resources are described as training and materials on detracking. Support is described as coaching and feedback.
    a. Probes: What did you find most helpful or least helpful?

7. How prepared do you feel to reach all learners in your detracked classroom?
    a. Probe: What barriers exist?

8. Have you implemented any specific new teaching or assessment practices in your detracked classes? Why or why not?

a. Can you describe a class that you taught or an assessment that you conducted that was new? Can you share any materials that you used for this class?
b. OR: Think back to a time that you taught a detracked class that you felt met your criteria for success, and a time when you taught a detracked class that you believed was unsuccessful. Can you describe those two classes for me? What about them felt successful or unsuccessful? Why?
c. What would have enabled you to feel more successful in the detracked teaching?

9. What additional training or support do you feel would make a detracking initiative more successful?

10. Do you have any detracking training materials or supplementary materials you would like to share with me as part of my data analysis?

Closing Statement: *Thank you very much for your participation in this study. I greatly appreciate your time and willingness to share your experience with training and support in teaching detracked English courses. You will receive a transcript of this interview for your review within one week of the interview. You will also receive an invitation to participate in a focus group with other interview participants in order to discuss the emerging conclusions found in my research. After synthesizing the responses, I may contact you again for clarification purposes. I will share my analysis with you prior to defending my dissertation in order for you to comment on my findings and provide feedback. You will receive a $25.00 Amazon gift card as a thank you for your time and participation today.*

Appendix E: *Email to Participate in Focus Group*

Dear Study Participant,

This is a request for your participation in a focus group discussion regarding detracking in your school building. I am conducting a focus group as part of a research study to increase understanding of teachers'perceptions of their successes and challenges as they participated in implementing a grassroots detracking initiative in their school building. This focus group is the final requirement to complete my Doctorate of Education program through th eUniversity of Maryland.

As an English teacher who participated in the interview process of my study, I would like to hear your feedback on the emerging conclusions I have discovered through my interview analysis. The Focus group will take around 45–60 minutes and will follow a semi-structured protocol, meaning all participants will be asked the same questions but will also have time to provide extended input. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the training and support you have received for detracking. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each participant will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write-up of findings.

The meeting will take place on Tuesday, August 15 from 9-10 AM via Zoom. You can join the meeting via

https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87321833437?pwd=aG9NUHdRUzlyT1R6SEM1SGliM0hoUT09

Meeting ID: 873 2183 3437

Passcode: 616436

Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research, and my findings could lead to training and support for your colleagues. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Catherine Sutton, Doctoral Candidate

Doctorate in Education

Appendix F: *Focus Group Protocol*

The purpose of this focus group, which will take place on Zoom, is to have teachers discuss their reactions and thoughts on the emerging conclusions discovered through my interview analysis. All interview participants will be invited to participate in the focus group regarding emerging conclusions which were developed after an analysis of interviews and training materials. The emerging conclusions from each of the Competency Drivers are as follows:

Conclusions Identified Around Fidelity Assessment

· **Identify and Review Clear Measures for Success:** Teachers would benefit from quantitative data that shows student growth. Only one teacher shared a quantitative piece of data when discussing if she reached all learners. Although teachers may not feel successful, there may be data they could review to confirm or deny these feelings.

· **Focus on Student Growth:** Teachers who focused on meeting students where they were, setting goals, and measuring growth reported a greater feeling of success with their detracked classes.

· **Teacher Mindset is Key:** It may not be possible to control the negative perceptions teachers have toward detracking, but proper training may help teachers feel more positive and equipped to teach in a detracked classroom. Teachers reported feeling frustrated by colleagues who began the initiative with negative feelings and refused to change their instructional approaches.

Conclusions Identified Around Teacher Selection

· **Consider piloting the program with select teachers prior to initial implementation:** A small program pilot allows for buildings to work out potential issues and may increase teacher buy-in if a respected member of the staff can share positive outcomes.

Conclusions Identified Around Coaching

· **Teachers benefit from regular collaborative planning run by a teacher leader:** Teachers seem to respond well to in-the-moment coaching from a colleague who is also teaching in a detracked setting. The feelings of collegiality and a shared vision among a team help to support more open mindedness and flexibility among the team.

· **A pre-established collaborative culture may increase positive outcomes during initial implementation:** Teachers who were previously engaged in peer coaching and walkthroughs prior to implementation seemed more comfortable showing vulnerability and working collaboratively as they implemented detracking.

Conclusions Identified Around Training

· **Teacher involvement in initiative development:** The detracking effort was more sustainable when teachers were given a voice with the program's development and training model prior to implementation.

· **Clear initiative purpose with shared definitions:** A lack of shared understanding of detracking and its purpose can create a barrier to teacher growth and development as they prepare to implement as well as implement the initiative. Moreover, a district should

work to develop consistent language and expectations across all buildings to avoid teacher confusion, and eventual resentment.

· **Develop clear and consistent training and support materials:** Each building was creating their own training and support materials, which led to inconsistent implementation among buildings.

· **Daily team planning:** Teachers require daily team planning with a teacher leader experienced with detracking and comfortable with supporting teachers, even those opposed to detracking.

· **Avoidance of Competing Initiatives:** Teachers expressed confusion and frustration regarding detracking and inclusion, which are two different initiatives. They were unclear on how the initiatives interacted with each other and also felt that supervisors and building administrators could not explain the difference to them.

Focus Group Protocol: All interview participants were invited to attend the focus group after polling availability and selecting the most opportune date based on their responses. The focus group will consist of participants from all three buildings used in the study. Participants will be sent the focus group guidelines and emerging conclusions to review at least three days prior to the meeting. I will serve as the moderator and begin the 60-minute virtual focus group by introducing the purpose of the group, which is to further discuss teacher perceptions of success and challenges during their school's initial implementation of detracking. This will help to set the stage and provide context for the participants. I will also establish some ground rules for the discussion, such as encouraging respectful dialogue and asking participants to avoid interrupting one another.

Once the introduction is complete, I will move on to the main discussion portion of the focus group. I will display the emerging conclusions for each driver used for my analysis. After displaying the emerging conclusions via a shared Google Slides screen, I will give participants three minutes to silently reflect on the question, “What are your initial reactions to these conclusions?” By creating this open-ended question, my hope is to have teachers generate a semi-structured yet organic conversation regarding the conclusions.

During the discussion, I will continue to facilitate conversation and ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute. This will occur through asking follow-up questions to clarify participants' statements or to encourage further exploration of a particular point. At the end of the focus group, I will summarize the main points discussed and ask participants if there is anything else they would like to add before the session concludes. At the conclusion of the focus group, I will transcribe the recording meeting. I will analyze the data collected during the focus group and to identify common conclusions or patterns that emerge from the discussion.

Introduction:

Thank you for your interest in participating in this focus group regarding teacher preparation and support during a detracking initiative. This study aims to gather valuable insights and opinions through focus group discussions. Your participation is crucial in helping me gain a deeper understanding of your perception of success and challenges during the initial implementation of a detracking program in your school building.

Before we begin, it is important to understand the protocol that will guide our focus group discussion. This protocol ensures that the discussions are conducted in a fair and respectful manner, allowing everyone to contribute their thoughts and ideas freely. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the following guidelines:

1. Confidentiality: All information shared during the focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity and any personal information will remain anonymous in any reports or publications resulting from this study.

2. Respectful Communication: It is essential to maintain a respectful and inclusive environment throughout the discussions. Please listen attentively to others and avoid interrupting or dominating the conversation. Respect differing opinions and avoid any form of disrespectful or offensive language.

3. Active Participation: Your active participation is highly encouraged. Feel free to share your thoughts, experiences, and perspectives on the topic being discussed. Your unique insights will contribute greatly to the overall findings of this study. You may also write your thoughts in the chat if you prefer.

4. Focus on the Topic: During the discussions, we kindly request that you focus your contributions on the specific topic at hand. This will ensure that our conversations remain relevant and productive. If you have any unrelated questions or concerns, please save them for the end of the session.

5. Open-Mindedness: It is important to approach the discussions with an open mind. Be willing to consider different viewpoints and engage in thoughtful dialogue. This will foster a rich and diverse exchange of ideas among the participants.

6. Confidentiality Agreement: Before the focus group begins, you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. This agreement confirms your commitment to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of all participants and the information shared during the discussions.

7. Duration and Recording: The focus group discussions will last approximately 60 minutes. Please be aware that the session will be audio or video recorded for research purposes only. These recordings will be securely stored and used solely for the purpose of analysis.

8. Consent and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. Your decision to participate or withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researchers or any associated organizations.

I appreciate your willingness to contribute to this qualitative study through your participation in the focus group discussion. Your insights will help us gain valuable knowledge and contribute to the advancement of research in this field. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask before we begin.

Thank you once again for your time and participation

Appendix G: *Memos Regarding Fidelity Assessment*

School	Raw Data regarding Fidelity Assessment	Memo
BHS	"I think there was a fairly positive vibe from that, from mostly just the classroom management standpoint at least." (Teacher D) It was fully online. We had some good classes for a while. I would say the first few months were solid and nada and I, I mean my to teacher didn't technically do anything but was kind of a good personality to bounce off of. And we were sort of DJing and trying to keep it interesting and fun and did lots of little group meetings and lots of breakout rooms and you know, it probably went most downhill when it started to go into the, the hybrid model and then it was just like, you know, you couldn't tell if there was a pulse anywhere." (Teacher D) "ut then they're definitely than at very, very, very, very low reading levels and some kids at very, very high reading levels and trying to keep some sort of engagement while, you know, I would've, sometimes there'd be one kid in class who was a very high reading level and he could be finished, you	Teachers felt that classroom management was easier in this model than in a typical academic level class. Teachers had the added challenge of teaching virtually due to the pandemic starting during their implementation year. They noticed that student participation was low as time went on, so it was hard to feel successful. Virtual instruction compounded the issue of heterogenous classes because the teacher felt unsuccessful engaging high performers while other students were tending to family needs during the school day.

	know, with anything we were reading just like that. And other kids, they were online. Maybe they were trying to read, maybe they weren't, maybe they were taking of their siblings, you know, go on and try to like figure out what was happening and then we'd see, you know, little babies running around. And so it was very hard to keep any pacing going at all." (Teacher E) "Well I, I was very determined that the class wasn't gonna take Okay. I, I was teaching an honors class and I felt really relieved strongly that we would modify the curriculum for the self-led students, but only as needed. Like only if it felt like they needed it and otherwise we charged ahead just like I would've if I had a regular nine honors, which I had taught many times before. So I literally was doing the same things that I had always done." (Teacher D) "So did you feel like you were able to reach all the learners in that room when you were in the room? Hundred percent. I know I was. Cause I took those special ed kids the next year they looped with me into virtual time into like the crazy virtual year and	This teacher was motivated to keep her honors detracked class rigorous and only modified material if it was necessary for a student. She felt comfortable doing this because she had taught the course for several years. She found this approach to be successful. This same teacher felt successful reaching all learners and shared that some students advanced to Honors in the following year even though they had ended the detracking initiative.

	they did great. They came to meetings, they were used to me, they and, but they went into regular English the next year. So we didn't have detrack 10th grade English. So they went into academic 10th grade English except for one girl who moved up to honors 10th grade English. One of the special ed students who probably never would've moved up to honors English if she hadn't been in that honors co-taught. But it was like, I don't know, something happened. It was great." (Teacher D)	This teacher describes how they began looking at growth more than they had in the past and found alternative forms of assessment.
	"Well, I mean I was looking for improvement. Like I know that especially with like I, I had some pretty low level kid, you know, kids who really were struggling in there and I definitely did. Yeah. I changed the way that I assess, I assessed them differently than I did everyone else. And I kind of like just made sure that it was okay to do that. But, but I also tend to assess everyone on improvement anyway. So everyone was getting improvement grades with their writing. Like I have an improvement grade rubric and they look at like their last piece and their current case and they sort of self-assess and then I assess and so that's a product grade, you know,	This teacher leader shared that teachers reported feeling that they were not "doing right" for the students, both high-achieving and high-needs students. Higher achievers were not being challenged in this model while high-needs learners were not

	are you improving? And so that, that helped a lot." (Teacher E) Like I think that would've made a big difference cuz it's just eyes and ears in a big class like that with kids on different levels. Cause kids who are high level are demanding too. It's not just that, you know, your struggling learners are demanding the, you know, super geniuses are super demanding too cuz they want to be stimulated. You know, they want, they have questions and they're good questions and they wanna engage. And so I think the teachers just felt really stressed and kind of like it was impossible to do right by anyone. That's sort of how they, they were feeling. They were like, you know, I'm not really doing right for these kids that are struggling and I'm also not doing right by the kids who need me to stimulate them and push them." (Teacher E) "But then the question is like, do we wanna make instructional decisions based on classroom management? And I think that's the philosophical question that we kind of got into at Patuxent is like, you know, instructional decisions to be based on instruction and what's best	receiving necessary support. This teacher leader shared that, although detracking helped with classroom management, it did not improve instruction. This teacher believes that, although homogenous grouping is harder for the teacher, it benefits the students more. This teacher shared that, although behaviors improved, a new set of challenges arose regarding instruction. They shared that this model required differentiation, which was a

	for learning, not what's best for the teacher, you know what I mean? Like what's easier for the teacher. Like sometimes things are hard for the teacher but it, it's still better for the kids." (Teacher D) " I guess I went into it thinking that it was going to be easier because sometimes with the academic level students you have behavior issues that you're, you're dealing with. And I thought that removing those behavior issues might make it a little bit easier to give those special ed students the time that they need. But it was, it had different challenges. Right. So I didn't, I didn't really have the behavior issues, but I had different very big academic challenges. And one being that you on day one have to start differentiating. Right. And it's, it's a tremendous amount of work." (Teacher N) "it was hard because while I feel like I'm pretty good at leveling and tiering skill-based lessons, it's harder when it's content-based. Okay. And so my, as the general education teacher, I was of course, cuz you asked, I'm sorry, you asked my role as the gen ed teacher. I was trying to create those tiered lessons	tremendous amount of work for teachers.

	and then my co-teacher would take those lessons and just see if they needed to be modified any further for those special ed students. But we, we, it was bumpy to start because we had both always done academic and co-taught students. So it was hard to engage those honor students with what we needed to engage the co-taught students with." (Teacher N)	
CHS	"I felt like I was glad that I was piloting it because the beginning of the year I was like, what did I do? Like seeing the difference in the students abilities was very intimidating. Like how am I gonna reach all of them? But I love a challenge. So I really dug in to figure out how I can support all these students and it's, it stretched me as a teacher because it, it made me look at things through different lenses." (Teacher B)	Teacher enjoyed the challenge and wanted to learn how to stretch herself. She made the choice to pilot the program.
	"I feel like I'm babysitting most days. I don't, I don't feel like I'm teaching. I really do feel like I'm just babysitting and then the moments I get to teach, I'm like, I got to teach today." (Teacher C) "But there's like so much happening constantly that it seems like no one has sat down and said, okay, what didn't we do right last year that we need to implement	This is a younger teacher who feels like she has no control in the classroom due to behaviors and unbalanced needs.

	for this upcoming year? Which is like concerning obviously because I can't take another year like this" (Teacher C)	Teacher has shifted to measure for growth other than meeting standards.
	"If I have a student who really struggles with English specifically and they, they wrote like, they tried so hard, right? Like they wrote as, as best they could, and it's still not gonna be at grade level. Like I know that going in, it's not gonna be a grade level, then I'm gonna base like their grade off the fact that they tried to the best of their ability and their current achievement, right?" (Teacher C)	This teacher had prior experience with heterogenous classes and it is her preferred method of teaching.
	"So I felt prepared partially because, so I came with my background when I came from [another school] and I had the only three academic level classes, it kind of blew my mind that they weren't just mixed in with the 12 honors sections that they already had. That would've just been like maybe five students per section. So I didn't teach a whole lot differently." (Teacher G)	This teacher recognizes that there is a lot of work to do in order to prepare for class. Lately, class sizes are too large for her to feel that she is reaching all learners.
	"So it, it looked different in the sense that there was a lot more work to do. Trying to differentiate for a much broader scope of students required just a tremendous amount of work to be able to do it well and it, because	

	of class sizes, I often felt that the kids who needed the most help were not getting it." (Teacher I)	This teacher felt that she was unsuccessful with high-performing students
	"I also felt that I was not able to challenge the kids at the higher end of the spectrum because you know, so much of your energy and time and focus goes towards those kids who are struggling." (Teacher I)	This teacher felt pressure to make sure students were passing, even if they were not meeting her standards.
	"it almost seemed like there was some pressure to ensure that students passed who may not, who may not have really earned it." (Teacher I)	This teacher experienced disruptive behavior that she did not normally experience in her Honors classes, which led to missed instructional time.
	I think that discipline support would have made a huge difference for everybody involved because not only are the lower achieving kids going to be able to achieve more when there isn't constant disruption, but the higher achieving kids are too. Like, I mean it's, you know, you're a teacher, you know what constant disruption does to a classroom." (Teacher I)	This teacher discusses using rubrics as a guide, having students make goals, and grading for growth.
	"when that detracking happened, rubrics became less important to me. Okay. They were used more as a guide rather than a rule. Okay. And so we looked at where they were, where the kids were, and tried to	This teacher discusses using a growth mindset

	make goals based on where they were kind of in that rubric or checklist or whatever other measures or benchmarks that I might have in front of them to, to reach." (Teacher K) "I had restructured things in regards to how I interacted with kids. On a more personal level, I think that I was into the mindset of, you know, whether I had a kid who was below grade level or struggling, you know, even, you know, very low or let's say high achieving, I kind of just tried to figure out where they were and tried to move them along, help them move along. So I think initially I didn't know exactly how I would look, but I, I kind of went in there again with that Maryland writing background that kind of addressed this in some ways with more student engagement, more relationship building. I wasn't like stressed out or anything. If you wanting like, how I felt." (Teacher K) "especially knowing the pace of what the higher level learner could do, it was always a concern that the pace was not as fast as I thought that they could go." (Teacher K)	with each student. She emphasized the importance of relationship building and student engagement. She did not find a detracked classroom to be overwhelming and felt successful. This teacher was concerned with pacing for her high achieving students

MHS	"And I ended up finding a lot of success with a good, good portion of the 10th graders. By the end of the year we now, we can now see their test scores, the MCAP scores have come out and some of them really did achieve and I, I firmly believe they would not have, if they had been in even my own previous experience with an academic level class, they would not have gotten the three that they got." (Teacher A)	This teacher feels that state testing supports the success of detracking in her building. She feels that the students who were assigned to academic classes learned more in the detracked setting.
	"there are personality issues when it comes to classroom management and instructional style. So now when you throw this extra layer across the top of like, oh by the way it's not really an honors class, you have, you have those kids in your room too. So trying to coach teachers through better strategies or more active teaching strategies then all right, here's your warmup. We're gonna introduce the story now read the story now by the end of class you should answer some questions." (Teacher A)	The new model required teachers to use more engaging teaching strategies, which was harder for certain teachers. They wanted to run their detracked class like a typical Honors class where students will complete any task they are given without disruption.
	"So my feeling very much that my job is my job and my job is to move students, whether they're high or low. So I didn't feel, the only thing that I felt changed because I had taught just academic	This teacher felt that disruptive behaviors greatly diminished in the detracked model. They have the mindset that they are there to grow students.

	before, what I felt was new and different was that I didn't have a whole class of behavior problems. So like, I actually enjoyed that we were doing this because I watched the behaviors really lessen when we detracked." (Teacher H)	This teacher felt able to focus on content and instruction and less with behaviors, like they had done in the past.
	"So I guess you could say my job changed in that way because I was able to focus more on content stuff and less on classroom management." (Teacher H)	This teacher talked about the challenge of differentiation since they had a wide range of abilities in a classroom. It was a lot to manage at one time.
	"So what I had to learn how to do was differentiate all within a period better than I had done before. Because in academic, like we differentiated and it was maybe two levels that we were looking at, not five or six different levels of like skills. So that was the biggest learning curve for me was how to manage that all in one class period." (Teacher H)	This teacher found it challenging to maintain high expectations and grade fairly for students who struggled with basic reading.
	"Yes. That, so the hardest part about that for me was if my standard is here and my expectation level is here, when I, I had like a student and I have him again this year in 11th grade, he reads at a third grade level. That's, it's very hard for me to constantly give him Ds because if this is my standard, but he, he really can't read no matter how many different aids we	

	give him. Which also means his writing ability is very low." (Teacher H) "So last year, how prepared did you feel to reach all the learners in your room? Did You not Not at All. Not at all. No, I'm not and I'll be, I'll be very frank. Like I, special education is not my wheelhouse and I have, I get frustrated because I don't know how to help. So I relied really heavily on my co-teacher and I ha it and it's a, it, it's a weakness of mine that like learned helplessness drives me up a wall. And sometimes there's a lot of that with like our special ed population. So I had to learn strategies from my co-teacher how to combat that, which was a, like, just drove me nuts. And, and it is, it's a different way to handle it with a student with an I E P than like someone who's just sitting in my honors English 10 classroom. So I had to learn more of probably like the executive functioning things than I had to learn how to like teach my content." (Teacher H) "And I feel like there's certain people that got into teaching because they were like, I like, I like, yeah. I was a good student. I like the way it was done to me, I liked that style. I'm gonna	This teacher did not feel successful with her low-performing students and did not know how to navigate the learned helplessness they observed in the classroom. Many students struggled with executive functioning, which presented different challenges. This teacher is reflecting on how some teachers have trouble understanding how to change their instructional practices. Many teachers enjoy teaching they way they were taught in school, not realizing that this approach does not work with all learners.

	do it again now and again. There are a lot of 'em are my age and we're, we're, you know, fifth year recent grads, you know, fresh out of, you know, almost high school themselves. And there's, they still wanna do things the old way and we're really in this enlightenment period, but it's an enlightenment period for those that want to be enlightened." (Teacher J)	This teacher finds teacher mindset to be a barrier to the program's success. Some of their colleagues felt like the program was going to fail before it even started.
	"So are you feeling like a major barrier to this whole thing is just teacher mindset? Yes. A hundred percent. Yes. Yeah. It's Only gonna work. It's, it's like, it's only gonna work if you let it work." (Teacher J)	This teacher emphasizes that teacher attitude is the most important indicator to the program's success. Some colleagues were very upset about the initiative before it started.
	"It comes down to attitude. She's just got like a positive out attitude. Like let's try it and we can make it work. Yeah. Whereas some of my other colleagues were, oh my God, if we try this, it's gonna fall apart and we're, it, it's gonna ruin the fabric of society forever." (Teacher J) "Did you feel prepared to reach all learners in your detracked classroom? No, I don't think anybody's really prepared. But I mean it was a did I I was determined to reach the more I wasn't gonna let anybody slide." (Teacher L)	This teacher did not feel prepared but points out that no teacher is ever prepared to each everyone. The teacher must maintain high expectations Teacher attitude is critical.

	“You know, if a teacher goes in and already still is not a fan and I can tell you that he's he's going to tell you that I don't know what to do with these kids and now, you know, I'll do what I can and I'll do this and. But he he's already come in with the attitude, though this isn't going to work. And that to me is a big problem” (Teacher L) “It will probably work better for a teacher that has more experience with just teaching.” (Teacher L)	This teacher believes that more experienced teachers would find better success.

Appendix H: *Memos Regarding Training Before Detracking Implementation*

School	Raw Data regarding Training before the Initiative Began	Memo
BHS	"Nothing. So, we did give, so everybody got a copy of Teach Like A Champion, but there was no real like specific PD around it. And we looked for some kind of like a, a summit or a training or something like that that we could go to over the summer before we started." (Teacher D) "I remember launching it to everybody and there were some like real naysayers and it was a very difficult year but, but I don't think there was really any specific pd. It was, it was more that the team was supposed to be like the pd." (Teacher D) "We read a book, the, so I'm also on the instructional leadership team and as a team we read a book and I can't remember the name of it. I can't remember if it's Detracking for Excellence in Equity…No. I, I think the intent was probably for that first set of teachers to do it and then maybe provide the training the next year. Yeah. But no, we didn't have any training…. It was it was a really big barrier. I think even just like having like a book study on, on some differentiation techniques or some techniques to use in a detracking classroom would've been helpful." (Teacher N)	Some staff read a general best practice book, but found it difficult to access detracking-specific training. There were those against it prior to the start. The expectation was that the team of teachers would pilot the program and provide training to others for the following school year. The leadership team read a detracking book, but not all detracked teachers read this book. The teachers who were piloting the program found the lack of training to be a barrier to their success. It would have been helpful to have more specific detracking training.
CHS	"We created like a pineapple culture where teachers were encouraged to pair up and do walkthroughs and observe each other and kind of like peer coaching. So, we developed a peer coaching model." (Teacher B) "No, not that I remember. I think it was just, hey, this is what we're going to try and do. Okay." (Teacher G)	The school had a pre-established culture of peer coaching and walkthroughs, which was intended to help with the detracking process. Staff do not recall any specific preparation for the program.

	"Okay. So, what kind of training did you receive before the initiative began? None." (Teacher I) "Only thing I remember was that we don't professional development days and we had to go to three or four different stations and places or you know one of them is always about detracking." (Teacher L)	Staff was given training during the pre-service days, but it appears to be just one session among many other topics.
MHS	"We did get some through like after we jumped in and some teachers were like deer in headlights. I don't know what I'm doing. We brought in some people to help us but it was definitely after, after the first marking period was over and yeah." (Teacher A) "I perceived it is that kind of later in the school year or maybe the beginning of summer, this decision was made to just like, let's go ahead and try this. So, over the summer we received like a three hour like crash course. Okay. And kind of how to handle it. And that was really all the training we had before entering our classrooms that school year." (Teacher H) "So, I thought it was helpful in the fact that it described like the purpose of the detracking and why we were moving in this direction. I think what wasn't helpful was there weren't a lot of strategies given Okay. To us of how to handle that. And, and to be fair, they were, it was a lot of information in a very short period of time. The other thing that was hard was not all of our team was able to attend the training, so that made it a little difficult too." (Teacher H)	There was no specific training prior to the initiative, just support afterwards. Some staff attended an optional "crash course" during the summer prior to detracking, but it still is perceived as a rushed decision. The purpose was shared during the training, but not specific teaching strategies. Since not all team members attended the optional training, it was difficult for everyone to have a shared understanding of the purpose.

Appendix I: *Memos Regarding Training During Detracking Implementation*

School	Raw Data regarding Training during the Initiative	Memo
BHS	"[Team planning] was the only support for the teachers who were doing detracking that year. Ok. Most of the teachers do detracking that year. And this would be what I would say was probably the biggest shortfall that we had at BHS that year because it didn't go well. Like it wasn't really received very well. I was having this great la la land experience and no one else was, I was alone and everyone else was really negative. And I think there were two pieces that played a role in that negativity. I think one was that there were not on board and most of the DETRACKED classes did not have co-teachers, Okay. At all." (Teacher D).	Teachers were having different experiences on the team, which affected the attitude and productivity of the team planning period. Not all teachers supported the initiative, so they weren't willing to learn and grow through the process. There is a perception that co-teachers are required in a detracked classroom, which indicates that they may be functioning under a different definition of detracking than the other buildings.
	"Because I was strong instructionally, I was leading them and like helping them develop lesson plans and like, and that was harder to do with science teachers in social studies. I don't know what the curriculum like, so I was helping them and giving, trying to give them tools and ways to make modifications and stuff. But they really weren't wanting to receive that feedback." (Teacher D)	Teachers were resistant to support from the teacher leader who taught a different content than them.
	"They do have a common planning period to work with each other to create lessons. They also have a common planning period with the special educator that supports them. Wow. I don't know if there's, I think there, their core lead works pretty hard to like help them infuse technology. Like he's a big advocate of getting things like Pear Deck or things like that, that kids can kind of work through things at their own pace. And they're a department that has engaged a little bit more with putting a lot of the work, like through Schoology so that the	The biology team in this building has ongoing success and continues to detrack. They work on infusing technology and allow students to work at their own pace through Schoology.

	kids are working at their own pace assignments as they, you know, show success on the assignment before." (Teacher N)	
CHS	"Critical friends who would look at our plan and kind of ask questions to see where the holes were or where we needed to provide more information. And then I really, along with yourself kind of looked into what, what we needed. So, we looked into the teach like a Champion book. We looked; I did a lot of conferences. I went to several of them through book companies, through McGraw Hill, Kylie Beers, Catlin Tucker. And just, we did a lot of book studies. I did personal book studies, we attended technology workshops to see what other, what technology support we needed or could use. So, it was a, the Southern Maryland or Southern, not southern Maryland, the somac, the Maryland Reading Conference to several of those. So, I would bring different things that I thought would be successful within a detracked classroom. And then as a team we had a, we have a team meeting every day with all English and nine TE teachers. So, I ran those. Part of those were like a professional development for those teachers. And then as we were progressing through the year, I would, we would talk about what does this look like. What supports are needed, what do we need to add, how do you address different students with different lexile levels, different learning styles, struggling writers, you know, so we spent a whole year having a PD daily." (Teacher B) "I think one of them was definitely teach like a champion because in order to have all these supports going on, in order to have different stations or different groupings, you have to have structure in routines within the classroom. So, I	This is the teacher leader from the collaborative team sharing strategies she used, along with the help of the detracking team. She attended conferences and read books that would support teachers during the implementation phase. She discusses after-school professional developments that were provided to detracked teachers, as well as book studies. An interesting thought is that these were optional, so the teachers who did not agree or chose not to attend, did not receive this information. The teacher leader emphasizes the importance of routines and rituals, which they used Teach Like a Champion as a means of teaching. The teacher leader is describing what is available to newer teachers, since they were not at the building during the first

	would say that those different workshops that had supports with how to create routines and rituals within your classroom, those were the most important." (Teacher B) "So, we have different things on Schoology through the ELA Schoology page that just lays out different strategies and supports that you can embed for teachers who have students. We have student support planning, so that would be the gen ed teacher, the special ed teacher working together to plan for students with IEPs. We'll do a lot of walkthroughs. We encourage a lot of peer walkthroughs because if, if one thing's being successful in a classroom, then it's good that that's the best professional development you can have been is the teacher right next door. So kind of giving them the ability and time to complete walkthroughs of other teachers that are having success within the building. And I think just constant feedback. So, when admin are doing walkthroughs, just giving them feedback like what are you doing well? And then have you thought about maybe trying this," (Teacher B) "[Collaborative planning] is an extremely important piece because that gives you time to, as a team, to look at student data as just your classroom, but also holistically to see what is working and might, might not be working in your classroom. But if it's, if teachers having success with it, having a discussion about what, what's going well and how are they doing that, and then maybe doing a walkthrough in their class to see how they're doing it. Okay. Yeah, team plan is huge." (Teacher B) "They'll [the ELA supervisor and Learning Specialist] be like, okay, here's	year of detracking PD. She finds the ELA supervisor to be a big asset through the strategies and supports she shares on Schoology. She also describes team planning and peer walkthroughs. The teacher leader finds that team planning is critical for teachers to discuss what is going well and what is not. It seems that the culture of the team is critical, so that teachers are willing to have these discussions and want to improve. This is a newer ELA teacher sharing her experience with training since she did not work in the building during initial implementation. She discusses how the ELA supervisor has them clearly set goals for students through the frame of must-do, can-do, and try theses. She finds that PD on strategies to reach different types of learners is helpful.

	a lesson. This is what we want students to achieve. Here's how we can approach this with different learners in mind. So, if you have a struggler in your class who really is working on their grammar, this is what they focus on. If you have someone who's a great writer, we push them to do this and this and this, right? Like the must dos, the can dos, or the must dos and the try these. So those have been helpful. Some of our professional development has focused on like different types of strategies that we can use to incorporate different types of learners or non-traditional learners, which was more focused on inclusion but was really helpful in, in detracking as well. I'm sure we did something when we were virtual, but that is starting to feel like a fever dream. Yeah. And I'm not sure I remember all the specifics, but there have been trainings provided where I felt like, oh that was super helpful. Like that really did help me a lot." (Teacher C)	A strong teacher leader seems to be critical in team planning. Backwards planning helps teachers thinks about what students need to achieve. This teacher finds team planning to be a critical part of detracking success. They build lessons and adapt them based on student needs.
	"Collaborative planning is so helpful because we have like our core lead in there who is she, for lack of a better word, she's a genius when it comes to how can we back plan? Like how we can backwards plan from what we need the students to achieve to the steps we can get them to take in order to help them learn this skill or learn this content or whatever it is they need to accomplish. And we get like a different teacher's perspective. Like, oh, I've been teaching for, you know, 18 years and this has worked in the past. And then we're like, okay, so how do we take that and how do we make this an easier access for a student who might not be able to write 500 words for this assignment?... And so, we're like, okay, then this person will be like, oh, well I tried this at my other school and this worked really well. So, the collaboration	This is a special educator who does not feel there is support or training for detracking. She does not have team planning on her schedule. Another teacher explaining how they find team planning to be a critical part of their success.

	part, like talking out the assignments, trying new ideas, developing different types of lessons, giving each other feedback on how they worked. It's amazing. Like we have almost four quarters worth of curriculum built up that we've created together over the last three years that we can tweak here. You know, if we get a new class like my freshman this year very different than my freshman last year, they, so they, they need different things and we can, we can go in and make those adjustments, but having like a team to bounce those ideas off of or to work together or to say, I'm facing this issue. What do you guys think I should do? And we can like talk that out. That's the biggest resource available and it's amazing." (Teacher C)	This team seems to have a positive culture. They find team planning to be emotionally supportive as well as instructionally supportive. This teacher is explaining the monthly optional trainings that were available during the first year of detracking. She is also discussing the peer walkthroughs.
	"I don't think there's been a lot of coaching. It's been more this is what, this is what you're going to do. You're okay, you need to go into this classroom. This is what you, what you need to do. I don't feel there's been a lot of support. It's, this is the way it's going." (Teacher F)	This teacher values the "thinking time" that is granted through team planning.
	"I think our team plan is the biggest thing for that. So just having that collaborative time to plan for, okay, these, these students might struggle with this, so what can we put in place in this lesson to make sure that they, you know, have the support they need. So pretty much just that collaborative time with colleagues the best." (Teacher G)	During team plan, teachers were able to write anchor papers so that students had models of strong writing.
	"Collaborative planning was incredibly helpful. Yeah, that was super helpful. Not only just in the planning part of it, but also just in the emotional support, the camaraderie and stuff that comes with that was really helpful when you're dealing with kind of that, that stress that comes along with trying new things all	

	the time. Kind of trying to figure out as you go without the supports and the training, having that extra planning with coworkers who were, you know, we could share ideas, we could share materials, we could share what worked and what wasn't working was super helpful." (Teacher I) [The detracking team] did a good job with bringing people together, getting materials, emails. I, I think we got together several times. I know during the, the time we had meetings monthly, people could go around and watch and give good feedback, things like that. But yeah, I think there was something to begin with." (Teacher K) "During the collaborative period, when you have different people in the room, it's going to bring great ideas, support. I felt supported, I felt engaged with ideas. And just the time in general is nice to be able to, you know, one of the best things about now is I have time to think, you know, and not just do, yeah. They'll send me the lesson and then it's like, so great. But that thinking time is vital." (Teacher K) "At the team meetings, we divide up the work out. You do this, you do this the, you know, write an example of a how to paper for 10th grade. And I'll do a 6 reasons paper for 9th grade and I mean I remember doing that last year with it." (Teacher L)	
MHS	"But we, we brought him in to kind of give us some information about like how to read some of these IEPs and what does this mean if instructionally because we know we're held to those things. So, if a special educator is not always in our classrooms, we're not always certain what the goals are for that student. So, it was really more like that. Yeah, I think we	This teacher talks about examining IEP's as a team in order to understand student needs and goals.

	had [the inclusion specialist] come in a handful of times throughout the time and I know I spoke with him as the core lead of the department a number of times trying to get strategies and ways to help my coworkers adjust to this new approach to education." (Teacher A)	This school was using a "push-in" model for special education, which was a new approach for them. They had conversations around what instruction looks like with the sped teacher in and out of the classroom.
	"But we definitely had lots of conversations in our planning, in our collaborative planning about like best practices when, when [the special educator] is in the room when he is not, what can that look like? And I think really good things came out of that. That definitely stretched some of the newer teachers." (Teacher A)	This is the teacher leader describing how she struggled with the difficult conversations around detracking/inclusion that took place in team meeting.
	"I know that I definitely had several conversations with…the English supervisor, like how can I help these teachers? Cuz I'm, I'm still just a teacher, but I'm also the teacher leader, so how can I, because these are difficult conversations. I'm definitely not a know-it-all. But at the same time, I have a lot of experience with varying levels of ability where some of them may not. So how do we, how do we navigate a classroom where you have a kid who's going to be a valedictorian and a kid who has a fourth grade reading level, how do we move forward with this? So, it was sporadic, but we did have, we'd had a few people coming in to support conversations happening during our planning" (Teacher A)	She felt that she was not equipped to handle these conversations since we was a colleague, not a supervisor. This teacher found the team planning period to be critical to their success for detracking.
	"I think the only other thing I would cite as a, a resource, even though it's not really like a physical resource, is we did have a collaborative period every day where both the ninth and 10th grade English teams were in the room together. So, we could have these overlapping conversations, which was, I know this	The teacher leader describes how the team closely read a student's IEP and developed a lesson based on that student's needs. She found it very helpful in moving forward with planning for student needs.

	doesn't happen at other schools necessarily, but I would 100% agree that that was a, a huge factor in our success level with the detracking." (Teacher A) "I asked everybody to bring one IEP to the team meeting just one. And I said we're gonna plan for that one student. So we're gonna look at their IEP, we're gonna look at what their deficiencies are and what their goals are and we are gonna design this lesson for that one student so that we really understand what the student needs. And what we discovered was that planning for one student, it was hard at the beginning, but most of the things that we did for that kid applied to other kids and their IEPs. But not having ever read an I E P from front to back, not really thinking about those specific needs in, in a setting where there are kids who don't have any of those needs. It was, it was mind blowing. And our, our lessons got way better from February to, I'd say probably April." (Teacher A) "It didn't feel like much because I felt like we were coming behind the eight ball. So we spent the first half of our year very frustrated and cuz I, I don't think [the inclusion specialist] came back and really talked to us until sometime in January and it may have even been after that. But we were very frustrated because a lot of new like special ed terminology was coming at us. We were being told like we're responsible for SDI, we didn't really understand what SDI meant. So like our stress level was really ratcheting up. And then, you know, close to the second semester, [the inclusion specialist] came in and started sitting with our collaborative group and talking about, no, you know, you, you don't have to really, it's not as much work as you're making it	This teacher also discusses their frustration with special education and not understanding how to service all students. There is a muddling of detracking and inclusion, and teachers are hung up on the concept of Specially Designed Instruction. The teacher perceives the training as coming too late after teachers are frustrated. Team planning seemed unproductive as teachers were frustrated with detracking/inclusion. This school year, they feel that they are receiving more proactive support. It was hard for colleagues to move forward due to frustration, but this teacher found positive momentum with

	out to be. We can do these different strategies." (Teacher H) "I think unfortunately [team planning] should have helped support detracking but everyone was so kind of frustrated and confused that we didn't know how to help each other. So a lot of times they turned into more like trying to battle frustration versus like what we could do better. So like I think the training we've gotten this year has been a hundred times better and we leave with like tangible things we can do versus like last year where we felt we were just in the thick of it and trying to like, kind of like triage." (Teacher H) "We have like the weekly co-teacher planning, like where you kind of like broad stroke plan your week and then you, you know, you look at that and you're like, where's my hardest one? This is where I'm gonna need my co-teacher, whatever. And then when you talk about our barriers and those kind of things, and those were not conversations that were happening between the whole team last year. I know [the core lead] and I worked really closely together to try to identify those and we were a good support for each other, but it didn't translate to the whole team. Cuz I think their frustration got in the way of like seeing that like, yes, it might be frustrating, but we have to figure this out so we can move on." (Teacher J). "[The inclusion specialist] came in a, a bunch of times to, not a bunch, probably two or three to our nine 10 collab. And it was like, he was railroaded. He was railroaded by like all the naysayers. [A Special Education supervisor] came in personally to explain, drum up, say this is what we're doing, this is the way of the	weekly co-teacher planning and working with the teacher leader to develop lessons. It seems that some teachers were not interested in this. Those opposed to detracking/inclusion seemed to overpower the central office specialists send to support the initiative. This teacher discusses how teachers may be feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information/training materials provided to them. Some of the information is redundant and may cause shutdown. This teacher found videos of colleagues teaching and discussing their practice to be an effective training model.

	future. He came in and did a whole, a larger group thing outside of any one grade level or one subject that a lot of people attended." (Teacher J) "I feel like they try a lot of these people that are training us or they're sending out the same stuff. Like I've seen the same co-teaching on, on, on three different colors, sheets of paper where all the different models, all the different explanations. I've seen the, the UDL guide that from Katie Novak's work, some stuff that [the sped supervisor] brought was, was, was different. But it's just, it, it's a lot to digest. It's a lot. And, and then if I, I imagine myself, I'm like, not in support of this, like, like a student, I'm just gonna shut down because the, the amount that we're throwing into one one hour PD session." (Teacher J) "there was also one PD day where the journalism teacher…put together, it had to have been close to an hour, at least 45 minutes of, you know, five or six teachers, them teaching, interviewing on their practices." (Teacher J)	

Appendix J: *Memos Regarding Coaching of Detracked Teachers*

School	Raw Data regarding Coaching	Memo
BHS	"They called me an instructional coach. And so I was part of that role leading the ninth grade group of teachers who had a team meeting for detracking." (Teacher D)	A teacher leader was assigned as a coach to support teachers during their daily collaborative meeting.
	"So with those teachers teaching, still doing it, are there any resources or supports available to them for detracking? So they do have a common planning period to work with each other to create lessons. They also have a common planning period with the special educator that supports them. Wow. I don't know if there's, I think their, their core lead works pretty hard to like help them infuse technology. Like he's a big advocate of getting things like Pear Deck or things like that, that kids can kind of work through things at their own pace. And they're a department that has engaged a little bit more with putting a lot of the work, like through Schoology so that the kids are working at their own pace assignments as they, you know, show success on the assignment before." (Teacher N)	This teacher leader feels that the common planning period allows teachers time to gather resources and supports. They also shared that this team has a department chair that leaders their team well. Special educators are also included in the team meeting.
CHS	We created like a pineapple culture where teachers were encouraged to pair up	This teacher leader describes how a culture of teacher walkthoughs and

	and do walkthroughs and observe each other and kind of like peer coaching. So we developed a peer coaching model. That was fair. (Teacher B) I don't think there's been a lot of coaching. It's been more this is what, this is what you're gonna do. You're okay, you need to go into this classroom. This is what you, what you need to do. I don't feel there's been a lot of support. It's, this is the way it's going. (Teacher F) When you have different people in the room, it's going to bring great ideas, support. I felt supported, I felt engaged with ideas. And just the time in general is nice to be able to, you know, one of the best things about now is I have time to think, you know, and not just do, yeah. So I am seven and it's so nice. They'll send me the lesson and then it's like, so great. But that thinking time is vital. (Teacher K) So we have different things on Schoology through the ELA Schoology page that just lays out different strategies and supports that you can embed for teachers who have students. We have student support planning, so that would be the gen ed teacher, the special ed teacher working together to plan for students with IEPs. We'll	peer coaching was pre-established and used during the initial implementation. This special educator does not feel that coaching has existed. She feels like she is told what to do with coaching or support. She is not able to attend the daily team meeting. This teacher attends the daily team meeting and expresses that

	do a lot of walkthroughs. We encourage a lot of peer walkthroughs because if, if one thing's being successful in a classroom, then it's good that that's the best professional development you can have is is the teacher right next door. So kind of giving them the ability and time to complete walkthroughs of other teachers that are having success within the building. And I think just constant feedback. So when admin are doing walkthroughs, just giving them feedback like what are you doing well? And then have you thought about maybe trying this (Teacher B) I think our team plan is the biggest thing for that. So just having that collaborative time to plan for, okay, these, these students might struggle with this, so what can we put in place in this lesson to make sure that they, you know, have the support they need. So pretty much just that collaborative time with colleagues the best. (Teacher G)	
MHS	I, I'm sure you, you know, having been a teacher leader, been an administrator, there are personality issues when it comes to classroom management and instructional style. So now when you throw this extra	

	layer across the top of like, oh by the way it's not really an honors class, you have, you have those kids in your room too. So trying to coach teachers through better strategies or more active teaching strategies then all right, here's your warmup. We're gonna introduce the story now read the story now by the end of class you should answer some questions. (Teacher A)	

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