ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: INCREASING BLACK STUDENT
PARTICIPATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO
SCHOOLS

Saroja R. Ringo, Doctor of Philosophy, 2008

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Equal educational opportunity, especially as it pertains to Black Americans, has a long ideological history in the United States. As part of that history, the achievement gap has currently taken center stage in mainstream discussions about K-12 education in this country. This study focuses on the implications of the achievement gap for Black students' participation and achievement in Advanced Placement classes.

Participation and success in AP courses is privileged in the college admissions process and students who perform well on AP exams are more likely to be accepted by institutions of higher education and to be better prepared for the rigors of college coursework. In high schools across the country, administrators are engaged in reform efforts to narrow the AP gap and ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to access higher education.

The existing literature suggests that addressing the Black-White AP gap requires deliberate, collaborative action on the part of school-personnel and students' families.

This involves the development of productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships based on high expectations and care. This qualitative study employs comparative case study methodology to investigate what two schools in a large, diverse, suburban school district are doing to 1) increase the participation of Black students in AP classes, and 2) support the academic achievement of Black students in AP classes. At each school, administrators, school counselors, AP teachers, Black AP students, and their parents were interviewed to develop understandings of the programs, processes, and practices aimed at addressing the Black-White AP gap as well as the various perceptions of each group.

As these findings indicate, school-district accountability pressures influence school-level reform efforts. In one school, increased pressures to meet accountability demands contributed to the creation of an accountability culture. At the other, characterized by a culture of achievement, there was less intense pressure from the school-district. Despite the varying accountability demands from the school-district, the climate at each school was influenced similarly by issues of race, which was a salient factor in relationships between White AP teachers and Black AP students and their parents.

INCREASING BLACK STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND ACHIEVEMENT
IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO SCHOOLS

By

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

For my mother and father

My first teachers in life and love

Your relentless pursuit of success in a country once foreign

That became your home,

And the sacrifices you made

Setting aside your own dreams and aspirations

So that I could pursue my own,

Have afforded me this great opportunity

To live my life in the service of others.

I am your legacy

In loving memory of my Dad,

I will not cry because it is over

I will smile because it happened

I love you both

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Chapter 1: The Problem of Under-representation and Low Achievement of Black Students in Rigorous High School Courses

Equal educational opportunity, especially as it pertains to Black Americans, has a long ideological history in the United States. As part of that history, the achievement gap has taken center stage in mainstream discussions about K-12 education in this country. This refers to the "gap" in achievement, as measured by standardized tests, between not only all lower- and middle-class students but between Black and Latino students on the one hand and White and Asian American students on the other who come from families with similar incomes (Rothstein, 2004). This study focuses on the implications of the achievement gap for Black students' participation and achievement in AP classes. In high schools across the country, administrators are engaged in reform efforts to narrow the AP gap and ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to access higher education. Within this context, advanced placement (AP) courses have become particularly significant.

Advanced placement courses have come to exemplify rigorous curriculum in high schools across the nation. The Advanced Placement Program allows students to complete college level work while enrolled in high school with courses taught by high school teachers. There are about 35 AP courses in 19 different subject areas. Students may take AP exams offered by the College Board every spring, examinations which are widely recognized by colleges and universities across the nation. In many states students who post qualifying scores on AP exams are exempted from statewide High School Assessment tests required for graduation (Aratani, 2006). Students who score well (typically scores of three or higher) are awarded college credit. Additionally, grades

earned in AP courses are often weighted an extra point in grade point average calculations. University of California schools, for example, grant applicants five points for an A in an AP course rather than the usual four (Burdman, 2000). Likewise, the University of Michigan considers the rigor of an applicant's high school curriculum in the admissions process and awards extra points in this category for AP course completion (Long, 2001). Students who take AP courses and do well academically in those courses, whether they take the exams or not, earn an additional point. This has the potential of increasing their weighted GPAs. This is significant in terms of college admissions processes which rely heavily on students' GPAs. Taking AP courses, whether a student takes the exam or not, signals to college and university admissions officers that a student is prepared for college level work. For all of these reasons, it is clear that taking AP courses in high school and doing well in the classes and/ or on the exams is important in increasing the academic achievement and college preparation of high school students.

Studies indicate that when children whose parents did not attend college participate in a rigorous high school curriculum, their chances of attending college improve as do their chances of continuing past their first year (NCES, 2001). Participation and success in AP courses is privileged in the college admissions process and students who perform well on AP exams are more likely to be accepted by institutions of higher education and to be better prepared for the rigors of college coursework (Rothschild, 1999). Additionally, graduates who earn credit for AP courses and exams are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree in four years or less than those non-AP graduates (Dougherty, Mellor & Schuling, 2006).

The AP program has expanded tremendously over the last five years. According the "AP Report to the Nation" (2007), one quarter of all graduates in the Class of 2007 had taken at least one AP exam at some point in their high school career, an increase of almost 50% from 2002. In addition to increased participation, students are also achieving at higher levels. Nationally, 15.2% of students passed at least one AP exam before graduating last year, up from 11.7% of the graduating class of 2002 (College Board, 2007). The report also shows that despite increasing numbers of Black students taking AP exams, Black students continue to be under-represented in AP courses and the nationwide passing rates for this group of students remains low, even as overall performance has improved. According to the report, no state with large numbers of Black students has yet succeeded in providing AP opportunities that allow for equitable representation of these students. Black students are performing at the lowest levels of all groups. Only 3.3% of Black students had a passing rate in 2007 and this is only slightly better than in 2002 when the percentage was 2.8.

Nationally, there exists an AP gap; students of color are under-represented and under-achieving in AP courses. In some areas, the problem is one of access and availability. Schools and school systems that do not provide opportunities for students to participate in rigorous high school course work, as exemplified by the AP curriculum, either because they do not offer AP courses or because they do not support student participation and success in them, are contributing to the exclusion of students from higher education (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). According to Trevor Packer, executive director of the AP program, AP is underused (Mathews, 2006). While hundreds of thousands of students have access to AP courses like calculus and biology, a College

Board analysis of PSAT scores shows that five and eight times respectively as many students could do well in those courses but never take them (Mathews, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

Because Black students in general continue to be under-represented and are under-achieving in AP courses, research is needed on what schools are doing to recruit and support the academic achievement of these students in these courses. This study examines two schools in the Jones Mill School District (JMSD). The district is among the top twenty largest school districts in the United States and the largest in the state where it is located. It houses 200 schools: 150 elementary schools (pre-K through grade five), 38 middle schools (grades six through eight), and 25 high schools. There are also seven special or alternative schools. During the 2006-2007 school year over 135,000 students attended schools in the JMSD. It is also a demographically diverse school district. During the same school year, 41.3% of students were White, 22.9% were Black, 20.7% were Latino, 14.8 % Asian, and .3% Native American. Of those students, over 14,000 are enrolled in the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program (almost half of the English language learners in the state). International students in the JMSD originate from over 160 different countries. In addition, 25.8% of students during the 2006-2007 school year qualified for the federally-funded free and reduced meals (FARMs) program.

The JMSD is also well funded and widely recognized on a national level for providing high quality education. The school receives the majority of its funding from local government sources (about 74%), another 20% from the state, and the rest through federal grants and enterprise funds. The district was ranked by Forbes magazine as one of the top five best school districts in America in terms of delivering high student

performance, as measured by SAT participation rates and scores as well as graduation rates, at a low cost (Forbes, 2007). Additionally, 2007 was the fourth consecutive year that high schools in the JMSD were ranked in the top 100 high schools in the nation by *Newsweek* magazine (Newsweek, 2007), where four appeared in the top 70. The annual rankings are based on a ratio devised by the Washington Post's education reporter Jay Mathews in which the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and/ or Cambridge tests taken by all students at a school is divided by the number of graduating seniors. Of the over 11,000 teachers in the JMSD, more than 80% have a Masters degree or equivalent. The JMSD prides itself on delivering high quality education and is guided by the core value that every child can learn and succeed.

Unlike many school districts where part of the problem of under-representation and under-achievement of minority students is a function of access and availability of AP courses (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002), students in the JMSD are not limited in terms of offerings. All 25 high schools in the district offer a wide range and number of AP courses to students each year in English, foreign language, mathematics, social studies, art, science, and computer science. Nearly half of 2007 graduates in the JMSD passed at least one AP exam, three times the national average. Between 2003 and 2007 the number of AP exams taken by students in the JMSD has increased 43% and the number of AP exams earning a 3 or higher has increased 39%. Black student participation has also increased. In 2007, while less than half of 1% of all Black students in the nation live in the JMSD, they accounted for more than 3% of all successful AP exams taken in the nation.

Although the numbers of Black students taking AP exams in the JMSD have increased steadily since 2000, Black students are still under-represented in AP courses and are not performing as well as their White, Asian and Latino peers. The school district reports enrollment by race but combines AP and honors enrollment. These data can be misleading because, while many Black students may be enrolled in honors classes, these courses are very different from AP classes and carry less social capital. The school district does report the number of students from various racial groups who take AP exams. This measure is a fairly good indicator of the numbers of students actually taking the courses. Although students may take AP exams without taking the corresponding courses, it rarely occurs. In 2005, approximately 2.8% of Black students took AP exams in the JMSD compared to approximately 3.2% of Latino/a students, 10.6% of White students and 11.6% of Asian students[1]. A score of three or higher is usually considered "passing" and often results in the granting of college credit. On exams administered in 2005, 17% of all Black students who took AP tests scored a three or higher. Meanwhile, for White, Asians, and Latino students the percentages are 53, 57 and 33 respectively. In a school system where access and availability is not an issue, why do Black students continue to be under-represented in college rigorous courses like AP and, among those who do participate in this rigorous coursework, why are they doing so poorly as compared to their peers, both majority and minority? More importantly, what are schools doing to address these problems of representation and low achievement?

In 2000, the College Board's National Task Force on Minority High Achievement produced a general report on the underachievement of minorities and emphasized that

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[1] These percentages are approximations based on student enrollment in the school system by race and numbers of students taking AP exams as reported in the Washington Post (Aratani, 2006).

more research is needed to understand the determinants of minority underachievement (Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 2000). Across the nation, university researchers and school systems have been trying to understand the factors that contribute to under-representation and low achievement of Black students in AP in efforts to address these problems. One issue regarding the AP gap may involve the economic gap between minority students and their White and Asian counterparts. While there is no cost for taking AP courses there is an exam fee of $84. To address this problem many states have begun subsidizing exam fees for low income students. However, there are other issues regarding this problem that are not as easily resolved by schools.

Research indicates that another factor contributing to the under-representation and low achievement of Black students in rigorous high school courses is the way schools are structured. Boykin (1986) argues that cultural racism in society is manifested in the attitudes and actions of school personnel and contributes to the sorting of students of color into low-tracks. The placement of students in high- or low-tracks is not based solely on student ability or achievement but is also influenced by subjective criteria. This includes teachers' expectations which are often based on biased perceptions of student appearance, behavior, culture, ethnicity, gender and social background (Dance, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999; Oakes, 1985). Ford and Grantham (2003) contend that deficit thinking held by educators about Black students also limits students' access and opportunity to participate in gifted or high-track programs. Still others argue that Black students choose not to participate in high-track classes. Rather than represent these students as victims of inequitable and discriminatory structures and systems, they suggest that these students have agency in resisting mainstream educational culture and

construct an "oppositional culture" that runs counter to mainstream educational values exemplified by college rigorous course work (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). One shortcoming in this area of scholarship is that it typically does not include the perspectives of Black students and their parents. In contrast, this study explored the experiences and perceptions of Black students and their parents to explore the AP gap in two public high schools.

The Jones Mill School District has a commitment to increasing the rigor of their academic programs and the numbers of students who graduate from their high schools "college ready". One of the goals in its strategic plan for improvement is to work towards ensuring that all students will graduate prepared for post-secondary education or employment. As a result, high schools in the district are working in a variety of ways to meet this initiative. This study investigates two high schools in the JMSD in order to better understand what each is doing to support the participation and academic success of Black students in high school AP courses/ programs.

Research Questions and Methods

The original questions guiding this work were:

1) In what ways do schools support the recruitment of Black students in AP classes?

    a.   Are formal or informal methods used? What are they?

    b.   What are the perceptions and experiences of administrators, school counselors, teachers, students, and parents in these processes?

2) In what ways do schools support the academic achievement of Black students in AP classes?

   a. Are formal or informal methods used? What are they?

   b. What are the perceptions and experiences of administrators, school counselors, teachers, students, and parents in these processes?

To answer these questions I used case study methodology. The data collected for this research is qualitative in nature and includes interviews with school personnel and Black students and their parents, observations of staff development activities, and relevant documents and artifacts from each school. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative coding schemes. The qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti was used to help manage this process. Early in the data collection and analysis process, I realized that the perceptions and experiences of school personnel, students, and parents was the far more important part of the story and what subsequent chapters focus on.

Rationale for the Study

This study is important because of the lack of research in this area. The achievement gap is widely discussed and written about as evidenced by the hundreds of resources, books, and articles that come up on internet searches. However, there is less research that looks at what schools can do and are actually doing to address these problems. More research in this area can better inform school personnel across the nation.

What are Schools Doing to Address the AP Gap?

Searches of the ERIC database using combinations of the key words *advanced placement, African American students, Black students, achievement, recruitment,* and

participation brought up 32 articles. Only focus directly on practice, highlighting what schools are doing to recruit and support the academic achievement of Black students in high school AP courses. One details the successes of a program instituted by a high school in Omaha, Nebraska (Saunders & Maloney, 2005). The Minority Scholars Program was implemented at Central High School in the fall of 1996 to address under-representation of minority students in honors and AP classes. After nine years, the program has increased the number of Black, Native American, and Latino students in AP classes. The article discusses the processes the school undertook to address these issues. In an effort to understand better why minority students were not taking rigorous high school courses and, when they did, were not doing as well as their White peers, school administrators created a steering committee made up of minority students to discuss the issues. Once they defined the problem, the school mobilized its resources in terms of staffing and funding to meet the needs of these students.

Similarly, the second article focused on practice was an interim evaluation of a restructuring program implemented at Governor Thomas Johnson High School in Frederick, Maryland (Guskey & Kifer, 1995). In the 1992-1993 school year the school restructured its class schedule from seven, 48-minute class periods per day to a block schedule format of four, 90-minute class periods per day. As a result, classes were conducted on a semester basis with each semester lasting 18 weeks or 90 instructional days. The decision to restructure the school schedule was based on the belief that the new structure would benefit students and teachers. While the goals of the restructuring were not specifically aimed at issues particular to Black students, one of the reported outcomes was that the scores of Black students on Maryland Functional tests and scores on AP

exams markedly improved after the first three semesters of implementation. Additionally, the report notes that office referrals and drop outs among Black students decreased and attendance increased.

While both studies may be useful in informing the practices of school personnel aimed at closing the Black/ White AP gap, more research is needed in a variety of contexts. Both studies analyze school level reforms and policies and the ways these support Black student achievement in schools. Neither considers the influence of broader school district imperatives on schools. What they do not consider or address are the influences of school district achievement imperatives on school-based administrators and their ability to implement school-level reforms. The two schools examined in my study are demographically different schools operating in a large, diverse school district and subject to the same school district imperatives for addressing achievement gaps, particularly the AP gap, between Black and Latino students and White and Asian students. Understanding how schools address the AP gap requires an exploration of relationships among school-based personnel as well as between school districts and schools and between schools and the community. One goal of this study was to develop understandings of the various processes and approaches used by schools to address the AP gap within a particular school district policy context.

Statistical Models: Race as Variable

The remainder of the research literature attempts to understand the AP gap between Black and White students in terms of statistical models that use race as a variable. Based on these models, researchers identify the existence of an AP gap

nationally and make generic recommendations to school personnel for addressing this issue.

Twenty four of the 32 articles found in the search of the ERIC database are Education Watch state summaries published by The Education Trust, an independent, nonprofit organization. These reports highlight disaggregated data from each of the 50 states on educational performance by race, ethnicity and family income. They also include data on participation and success in AP courses. In every state, Black students are underrepresented among AP test takers. According to national data from this organization in 2005, while Black students were 17% of public K-12 enrollment, they were only 5% of students who took the AP Calculus exam that year, 7% of the AP English Language and Composition exam takers, and 6% of the AP Biology exam takers. In terms of achievement on these same exams (scores of 3 or higher) Black students scored well below their White and Asian peers (Appendix A). These data provide evidence of a participation and achievement gap regarding AP courses but do not necessarily inform practice.

In addition to these reports, five studies were found that used statistical models to study the Black-White AP gap. One representative study explored factors that promoted initial student participation in the AP Program in Texas (Klopfenstein, 2004). Drawing on an analysis of the Texas Schools Microdata Panel (TSMP) for the 1998-1999 academic year which includes data on White, Black, and Latino students in Texas public high schools, this study found that particular student characteristics potentially influence AP participation decisions. These include: year in school, gender, family income, academic track, migrant status, and parent education.

According to this study, upperclassmen were more likely to enroll in AP courses than freshmen and sophomores. According to Klopfenstein (2004), this may be due to the fact that AP courses are not only challenging but college preparatory in nature. Klopfenstein also found a gender gap, with more girls participating than boys. Looking at gender participation by race revealed that, in Texas, Black males were predicted to participate in AP at approximately half the rate of White males. Black females, while slightly higher then Black males, participated at a rate between 60 and 70 percent of White females, regardless of income. Low income reduced AP participation rates by approximately 40% and was not statistically different for White and Black students. Still, low income disproportionately affected Black and Latino students because more than three-quarters of these students were low income compared to only one quarter of White students.

Academic tracking, as represented by special education experience, was also a strong negative predictor of AP participation, regardless of race. However, as with low income, Black students were overrepresented in special education tracks, making the adverse impact greater for this group as a whole. The Klopfenstein study also found a negative effect of recent immigration status, as proxied by Limited English Proficiency, for Latino students, with a 30% reduced predicated probability of AP participation. Lastly, mother's education was found to have a positive impact on AP participation, regardless of race. The data provided some evidence that mother's education was more important for Black males than for Black females and less important for Latinos as a whole than for White students.

Klopfenstein (2004) suggests that, given the high rates of poverty and academic underachievement among Black and Latino students in Texas and the growing size of public high schools, these students do not have equal access to AP programs. Klopfenstein argues that while student and family characteristics have the largest impact on a student's AP participation, school characteristics are also significant predictors. Among those characteristics are the likelihood of individual mentoring, the diversity of AP offerings, magnet programs, urbanicity, and AP incentive programs. According to Klopfenstein, Black and Latino students represented in the TSMP data typically did not have academic role models (adult role models who have either attended college or are college graduates) at home and in their communities. He suggests that these students needed mentoring at school in order to understand the benefits of a rigorous high school curriculum for college and labor market preparation. According to Klopfenstein, students' failure to perceive these benefits is evidenced by their failure to take AP courses, even when a wide range is offered. However, Klopfenstein's analysis does not consider the possibility that Black and Latino student under-representation in AP classes is subject to a variety of other factors. One of these factors, explored in this study, is the influence of productive teacher-student relationships, particularly for Black students, in students' decisions to take AP classes. The assumption that Black and Latino students do not take these classes because they do not value or see the benefits of taking AP classes is not supported by data collected in the TSMP.

From this study, Klopfenstein (2004) argues that schools have a responsibility in addressing the needs of Black and Latino students if they are interested in promoting a rigorous high school curriculum among these students. First, schools need to foster a

more "intimate environment" while providing a diverse advanced curriculum. This might be achieved through the small schools model: dividing large high schools into smaller "schools-with-a-school". Second, academic tracking should remain flexible enough that students are able and encouraged to pursue challenging academic tracks. This also might require schools to eliminate magnet programs which typically support rigid academic tracking processes as early as elementary school and may be inhibiting Black and Latino students from pursuing AP classes at the high school level. Last, schools need to hire AP teachers who are invested in the success of Black and Latino students and able to serve as role models and mentors, and administrators need to provide teachers with support and training as well as incentives for student achievement.

Another article, from ACT and similar to the structure and nature of Klopfenstein's piece, uses quantitative data to define the problem of Black students' under-representation and achievement in rigorous high school courses and makes recommendations for action (American College Testing Program, 2002). This study uses data for 14,915 respondents, including 1,685 Black students. These students were participants in the National Educational Longitudinal Study, which tracked students from 1988, when they were 8th graders, through 1994, when most of the students were about two years beyond high school. In an analysis of survey data that focused on students' educational expectations and their postsecondary participation two years beyond high school, ACT found that weak school relationships had a significant negative impact on students' educational outcomes and postsecondary participation. ACT argues that effective school relationships are an important factor in supporting student achievement. ACT suggests that in order for Black students to succeed academically they "need to

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know that at least one adult in the school continually cares about them and their future after high school" (p. 16). The article frames the problem primarily as a function of poor mentoring and guidance and makes a recommendation for change based on a framework created by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP): the Personal Adult Advocate model. These advocates can be teachers, counselors, principals, or other school staff who are committed to mentoring and guiding students.

These studies attempt to understand the Black-White AP gap through analysis of statistical models where race was included as one of many control variables (socioeconomic status, level of education of parents, etc.) and treated as an individual attribute. These models were used to test the significance with which race was associated with AP participation and achievement. According to O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller (2007), the problem with studies like these is that they treat race as a variable. That is, they tend to conceptualize race as a stable, objective category. This contributes to conceptual limitations in developing understandings of Black (and Latino) students' educational experiences. O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller suggest that the problem with these types of studies is that they often lead to misinterpretations of racial "significance". What start as statistical correlations become traits embodied by an entire racial group. In studies of Black achievement, where race is treated as a variable, researchers are inclined to "homogenize the Black community and underestimate the effects of racial discrimination" (p. 543).

One study of the AP gap from the ERIC database search that did not rely on statistical models is an ethnography of Black students in a middle-class, suburban high school (Ogbu, 2003). Analyzing the experiences and perceptions of teachers, students and

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parents of the AP gap, Ogbu makes several recommendations for communities and schools interested in increasing the participation and academic achievement of Black students in rigorous high school courses. Ogbu argues that communities need to provide supplementary education programs as well as recruit leaders from the community as role models for students. He recommends that schools help students develop good study habits and skills, a sound self-concept and identity, and the ability to resist anti-academic peer pressure; provide better course-taking advising, have high expectations of students and recognize the impact of expectations; help parents take a greater role in the academic life of their children; and provide parents with more information on tracking practices and differences among honors and Advanced Placement courses, regular classroom placement, and remedial classes.

While Ogbu's study attempted to describe the heterogeneity of Black educational experiences, it did not situate school practices within the broader school district policy environment. Additionally, his study did not consider the influence of this policy environment on school cultures. Implementing the recommendations Ogbu makes for addressing the AP gap involves the development of school cultures that support relationship-building. Ogbu does not specifically discuss the influence of the broader school district policy environment on school cultures, the significance of relationship building aimed at addressing the AP gap, or the challenges involved.

The existing research literature seems to imply that supporting Black student participation and academic achievement in AP courses requires collaboration on the part of schools, communities, and parents. This qualitative study examined the perceptions and experiences of school administrators, school counselors, AP teachers and other

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school staff, as well as Black students and their parents, in order to determine what two high schools were doing to address the AP gap. In developing a conceptual framework for understanding the AP gap, I considered the findings of previous studies as well as other relevant literature that explored the academic achievement gap in general.

Conceptual Framework

Four major theoretical perspectives were considered in this investigation of factors that contribute to the AP gap: deficit theories; oppositional or resistance theories; critical and socioeconomic theories; and theories of cultural relevancy, teacher expectation, and care. These perspectives offer individual, structural, and cultural explanations for the achievement gap. Drawing on perspectives that attempt to identify factors that contribute to the achievement gap, I developed a conceptual framework for what schools should be doing to address the AP gap (see Appendix B).

Deficit Theories

Deficit theories assume that children, in this case Black children, lack the knowledge and skills necessary for school achievement because of cultural, biological, environmental, or social differences. Deficit theorists blame students, their families and cultures for their underachievement. Proponents of this perspective argue that schools can do little to change this phenomenon. One contributing factor to the AP gap in schools may be that teachers and other school personnel hold deficit beliefs and perceptions of Black students. Deficit perspectives of Black students can influence teacher expectations of students and the nature of relationships that develop between teachers and students and their parents. Investigating what schools are doing to address the AP gap involves an

examination of teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships (see Appendix B). This study analyzes the nature of these relationships.

Oppositional/ Resistance Theories

Proponents of this perspective suggest that Black students' under-representation and low achievement in AP happen as a result of their opposition. They argue that Black students' refusal to take rigorous high school courses or to focus on academic achievement represent acts of opposition to the norms or authority of schools and their agents that students perceive are working against their best interests. Another reason is fear of being ostracized by peers, being labeled as "acting White". Still another reason centers on the feeling of social isolation that many Black students experience when they take rigorous high school courses where they are the minority. Ogbu's (2003) ethnography of a racially mixed, middle class community in Shaker Heights, Ohio explores Black students' low achievement and his findings support each of these views. His research suggests that an important factor in Black student participation and achievement in AP courses may be social or peer group support. Informed by these theories, this study examines the influence of social or peer support on Black students' decisions to take AP classes (see Appendix B).

Critical and Socioeconomic Theories

Critical and socioeconomic theories focus less on characteristics of people and their cultures and more on ideological and structural inequities in society, particularly outside of schools. Proponents of this perspective argue that social inequity, including disparities in wealth, health care and housing, work to create and sustain a status quo in which the ideas and economic prosperity of particular groups are privileged at the

expense of others. These proponents argue further that inequities in society are reproduced in schools and contribute to differential outcomes such as achievement gaps. Underlying this perspective is an assumption that schools cannot address the achievement gap without redress of broader ideological and socioeconomic inequality that exists in society. Over-reliance on this perspective can relieve schools and school personnel of responsibility for addressing achievement gaps.

This study of two demographically different schools identifies and examines a variety of school-level reform efforts that challenge this perspective. While schools have little power or resources to affect change regarding ideological hegemony or disparities in wealth in society, they can be agents of change through their commitments to addressing achievement gaps in schools. This might be evidenced through special programs in schools aimed at subsidizing costs of exams, providing academic support services at minimal costs to students, or reallocating resources in ways that support the most disadvantaged students. Schools that aim to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP create cultures to support students as part of a collective, shared responsibility for student achievement. This collective includes school personnel (administrators, school counselors, and teachers) and students' families working together, governed by productive relationships (see Appendix B).

Theories of Cultural Relevancy, Teacher Expectations, and Care

The fourth perspective I considered that attempts to explain the achievement gap analyzes the influence of teacher expectations, cultural relevance and care on student achievement. A major assumption that underlies these theories is that students' learning in classroom contexts is mediated through processes of cultural socialization as a result of

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relationships with their teachers. Proponents of these theories argue that student achievement is in many ways dependent on productive social relationships in schools with teachers, relationships that are often defined by teachers' expectations of students.

The relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement has been the focus of much of the achievement gap literature, particularly in analyzing reasons for disparities in achievement between students from different socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, and among those with special needs (Good & Brophy, 1987; Irvine, 1990). Increasing the participation and achievement of Black students in AP requires school personnel to not only have high expectations of these students, but act on those expectations in ways that support these goals. This study explores AP teachers' expectations of Black students and analyzes the influence of these expectations on the AP gap at each school.

Additionally, cultural relevance and responsiveness among teachers of Black students has been demonstrated to influence achievement. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching assumes that, "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (p.106). Gay argues that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to, among other things, demonstrate caring, build learning communities, and communicate with ethnically diverse students. There are numerous studies in the research literature on culturally responsive/ relevant teaching and pedagogy in action (Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001a; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Data for this study include interviews with Black AP students about their perceptions of their AP teachers. Analyses of these data consider the

influence of culturally responsive/ relevant pedagogy on these students' participation and achievement in AP classes (see Appendix B).

Summary

This study of two demographically different schools in one large, suburban school district explores school-level efforts to address the Black-White AP gap. The research literature suggests that an effective program geared towards recruiting and supporting the academic success of Black students in AP courses includes attention to school forces, community/ family forces, and the development of productive school-family relationships within a shared culture of collective responsibility. Ford (2004) argues that the development of productive school-family relationships is an important factor in supporting the academic success of students, particularly those students in rigorous high school courses.

According to Edwards, McMillon, Turner, and Laier (2001), "No teacher truly works alone. Schools can be seen as networks of individuals who work together to help children learn. These networks can include teacher teams, parent groups, and parents working with teachers, who work either together or at cross-purposes" (p. 146). In-school factors for addressing the AP gap include structured academic support for Black students, high teacher expectations, and social/ peer group support. Outside of schools, parent support is also critical to the success of Black students in rigorous academic courses. Working collaboratively, parents and schools can not only increase Black students' participation in rigorous high school courses, they can also provide them with structured academic support that increases achievement.

In the next chapter I explore the literature that informs this study. In this literature review I begin by situating this study historically in the context of equal educational opportunity ideologies. Then I describe and analyze the various theoretical perspectives that have been employed to understand the achievement gap and explore the implications of these for addressing the Black-White AP gap. Chapter three describes in detail the methodology and research design of this proposed study.

In chapters four through six I analyze the data collected for this study. Chapter four examines the influence of accountability pressures from the school district on each of the two schools. Accountability pressures from the school district influence the development of particular cultures at each school. These in turn influence reform efforts at each school for addressing the AP gap. In Chapter five I examine the influence of accountability pressures and school cultures on school personnel and on the development of collaborative relationships for addressing the AP gap. Chapter six explores and analyzes the nature of relationships between AP teachers and Black students and their parents. In the final chapter, I summarize the findings and discuss implications from these findings for research, policy, and practice in schools and school districts.

Although the intention of this study is not to blame teachers for the problem of Black student under-representation and achievement in AP courses, the results indicate that some teachers were less adept at supporting students than others. If educators and scholars are genuinely interested in exploring these issues and working toward solutions, an essential part of this process involves critical analysis and consideration of the way teachers' interactions with students may be a factor. Analyzing these interactions from the perspectives of teachers, Black students, and their parents suggests the importance of

ongoing professional development for teachers, even the most well-intentioned, regarding

issues of race and relationship building.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Achievement Gap

America's experience with slavery and the ways it has contributed to the development of institutional racism towards Black Americans has played an undeniable role in educational inequity. The conceptual framework and methodology for this study is informed by literature that addresses the Black-White achievement gap in education. This literature review will first situate this study within the historic dilemma regarding equal educational opportunities. The first section traces the history of inequity for Black Americans and the debates among prominent, historical and contemporary, Black leaders and educational scholars.

The second part of this literature review describes and analyzes various theoretical perspectives that have been employed to understand the Black-White achievement gap and explores the implications of each for addressing that gap. There are those that place the blame for underachievement on students and their families, drawing on anecdotal evidence and qualitative and quantitative empirical studies to argue that the academic underachievement of Black students may be the result of genetics and/ or social and cultural practices. There are others that argue that achievement must be understood within the context of socioeconomic inequities in society and that these inequities are largely responsible for the underachievement of Black students. The purpose of this section is to explore and consider various perspectives from the broader research and academic community.

Part I: History of Inequity in Education for Black Americans

Segregation practices in this country were widely established well before the Civil War and institutionalized nationally as a result of *Plessy* (1896). African Americans were

viewed as inferior and incapable of achievement. Educational historian David Tyack (1974) writes, " To have been *born* black was normally to have been labeled a failure- an inferiority all too often justified by bogus science- as millions of Negro children learned in school systems which were consciously or unwittingly racist" (p. 217). Segregation, then, did not just mean separate; it translated into the inequitable distribution of resources between African Americans and Whites in this country. In his analysis of the early history of segregated education in the U.S., Spring (2005) argues that Whites had ambivalent attitudes about the education of African Americans. On the one hand, as was the prevailing attitude toward immigrants, many Whites felt threatened by African culture and wanted to assimilate African Americans to the dominant Protestant culture. On the other hand, there were Whites who saw Blacks not only as threats to their culture but to their "racial purity" (Spring, 2005, p. 114). For that reason, they wanted Blacks segregated in society and Black children educated in separate schools.

Institutional racism in the larger society relegated Blacks to an inferior status and this was reproduced through segregated school systems in America during most of the twentieth century. Black schools were ill equipped, had fewer resources than their White counterparts, and were usually overcrowded. In 1939, the median expense for Black classrooms was $477 as compared to $1,166 for White classrooms (Tyack, 1974). There were few professional jobs available to Blacks in the employment market, and schools were designed to insure their political and economic impotence (Rury, 2005). Bleak employment prospects counteracted the benefits of schooling. Some educators recognized the hypocrisy of the rhetoric about democratic education given the social reality for Black children. One such educator was Booker T. Washington.

Washington was born into slavery to a White, slave owner father and a black, slave mother in Franklin County, Virginia in 1856. He moved with his family after emancipation to work in the salt furnaces and coal mines of West Virginia. It was during this time he learned to read and write while working at manual labor jobs. At the age of sixteen he attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, now Hampton University in Virginia, to train as a teacher. In 1881 he founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute on the Hampton model in the Black Belt of Alabama. He was granted an honorary Masters of Arts degree from Harvard University in 1896 and an honorary Doctorate degree from Dartmouth College in 1901.

Washington received national prominence in 1895 when he was invited to speak before an integrated audience at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition held in Atlanta in September, 1895. He was the first Black man ever to address such a large group of southern Whites. This brief speech, known as the "Atlanta Compromise", outlined his social philosophy and racial strategy. He called on White America to provide jobs and industrial-agricultural education for Blacks. In exchange he suggested that Blacks would curb demands for social equality and civil rights. His message to Blacks was that political and social equality were less important as immediate goals than economic respectability and independence. Washington believed that if Blacks gained an economic foothold, and proved themselves useful to Whites, then civil rights and social equality would eventually be given to them. He urged Blacks to work as farmers, skilled artisans, domestic servants, and manual laborers to prove to Whites that all blacks were not "liars and chicken thieves" (Harlan, 1972, p.45).

Washington's philosophy was considered by many as too accommodating to White oppression. He advised Blacks to trust the paternalism of southern Whites and accept the reality of White supremacy. He stressed the mutual interdependence of Blacks and Whites in the South, but recommended they remain socially separate: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (Washington, 1986, pp. 221-222). Washington urged Blacks to remain in the South, obtain a useful education, save their money, work hard, and purchase property. By doing such things, Washington believed, Black peoples could ultimately "earn" full citizenship rights.

White Americans responded with enthusiasm to Washington's racial policies, and revered him as the national leader of Blacks. Northern Whites saw in Washington's doctrine a peace formula between the races in the South. Southern Whites liked the program because it did not involve political, civil, and social aspirations, and it would consign Blacks to an inferior status. Because Washington's program conciliated Whites, White philanthropists made substantial contributions to Tuskegee and other institutions that adopted the Washington philosophy. In 1901, Washington published his autobiography, *Up From Slavery,* which outlined his program of accommodation and self-help. *Up From Slavery* gave an overly optimistic view of black life and race relations in America and likely gave another boost to Washington's career. However, several Black leaders, including W. E. B. DuBois, voiced their opposition to Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" and its mantra to work and wait.

DuBois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868 and did not know the stigma of slavery. DuBois was educated at Fisk University, Harvard University

(where he earned his Ph.D. in history in 1895) and the University of Berlin. DuBois was a professor of economics and history at Atlanta University where he conducted a series of sociological studies on the conditions of Blacks in the South at the same time Washington was developing his program of industrial education.

DuBois was an early proponent of Washington's program. He enthusiastically accepted the "Atlanta Compromise" philosophy as sound advice. During the late 1890s, there were several similarities in the ideas of the two men, who for a brief period found issues on which they could agree. Both Washington and DuBois tended to blame Blacks for their condition. They both placed emphasis on self-help and moral improvement rather than on civil rights. Both men placed economic advancement before universal manhood suffrage and were willing to accept franchise restrictions based on education and property qualifications, but not race. Both strongly believed in racial solidarity and economic cooperation, or Black Nationalism. They encouraged the development of Black-owned businesses and agreed that the black masses should receive industrial training.

The years from 1901 to 1903 were years of transition in DuBois' philosophy. DuBois started to find Washington's program intolerable, as he became more outspoken about racial injustice. He began to differ with Washington's notions of a "useful" education for Blacks. While Washington emphasized vocational and technical types of *training* that prepared Blacks for immediate job opportunities, DuBois argued that liberal arts *education* was also important. DuBois charged Washington with being too accommodating and that his program produced little real gain for the Black community. Hence their ideological battle began.

DuBois launched a well-reasoned and thoughtful attack on Washington's program in his classic collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). With the publication of this book, DuBois assumed leadership in a struggle against Booker T. Washington and a radical protest movement for civil rights for Blacks. In an essay from that book entitled, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" DuBois argued that Washington's accommodationist program asked Blacks to give up political power and an insistence on civil rights and access to higher education for Black youth. DuBois opposed Washington's program because he believed it devalued the study of the liberal arts, ignored civil, political, and social injustices, and led to the economic exploitation of Black people. DuBois charged that Washington's program tacitly accepted the alleged inferiority of Blacks. He believed that Washington's policies had directly resulted in three trends for Black Americans: their disfranchisement, the legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority, and steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for their higher training. Expressing the sentiment of radical civil rights advocates, DuBois demanded for all Black citizens 1) the right to vote, 2) civic equality, and 3) the education of Black youth according to ability.

Ironically, DuBois is not immune from the criticisms he has launched on Washington. Playing on the fears of Black violence and rebellion that haunted many White people in the early twentieth century, DuBois advocated that by expanding opportunities for Blacks to obtain a liberal arts college education, White citizens might better avoid acts of revenge from a people who had been, and continued to be, raped, oppressed, and dehumanized. According to DuBois:

Even today the masses of the Negroes see all too clearly the anomalies of their

position and the moral crookedness of yours…of the nine millions of Negroes in

this nation, there is scarcely one out of the cradle to whom these arguments do not

daily present themselves in the guise of terrible truth. I insist that the question of

the future is how best to keep these millions from brooding over the wrongs of the

past and the difficulties of the present, so that all their energies may be bent

toward a cheerful striving and cooperation with their White neighbors toward a

larger, juster, and fuller future (pp. 136-137).

He suggested that to maintain cooperation between the races the same educational

opportunities needed to be available to Blacks as were available to Whites. He believed

the solution to this problem was to expand opportunities for Blacks to participate in a

liberal arts college education. DuBois wrote:

The function of the Negro college is clear: it must maintain the standards of

popular education, it must seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must

help in the solution of problems of race contact and cooperation. And finally,

beyond all this, it must develop men" (p. 138).

DuBois' approach seems no less accommodating than those of Washington. He suggested

that a liberal arts education, or "popular education" defined by the dominant White

culture, would essentially prepare Black men to live cooperatively with White men.

However, DuBois did not necessarily advocate that this type of education was suitable for

all Black men. Instead he suggested that there existed among Black men a small group of

leaders he called the "Talented Tenth" who, given a liberal arts college education would

lead the way for economic and cultural elevation of the Black masses.

In the final analysis, both Washington and DuBois wanted the same thing for Black Americans, equal educational opportunities. Although Washington focused on vocational training and DuBois was more interested in an education that focused on the liberal arts and cultivation of the intellectual capacities of men, both saw education as key to Black economic empowerment. These arguments remain relevant and pertinent in twenty-first century debates about the Black-White AP gap in secondary schools.

Participation and achievement in AP courses have increasingly become privileged criteria in the college admissions process and higher-education is a powerful tool for socio-economic mobility in America. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006), in 2005 incomes among college graduates were on average twice as high than those who had only a high school diploma. Today social mobility and economic prosperity on average is connected to higher education. Students who are not afforded equal opportunities to participate and achieve in AP courses are disadvantaged.

Washington and DuBois' ideas about the value of different types of education are relevant to this dissertation. In seeking to explore what schools are doing to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP courses, I advocate for a particular type of high school education; one that involves college preparatory course work. DuBois in similar fashion advocated for higher education for Black people. However, while DuBois advocated for this type of education as a means to cultivate a small group, the Talented Tenth, who he suggested would serve as leaders for the masses, I suggest that *all* students have a right to equal educational opportunities and the subsequent social mobility it affords them. Today AP courses, exemplifying rigorous high school course work, and the accompanying exams, carry significant weight in the college admissions

process. Students in America's high schools who participate in rigorous AP courses and perform well on AP exams are advantaged in the process. Given this, the Black-White AP gap is problematic. Black students are less likely to take these courses and, when they do, tend to achieve at lower levels than White students. This contributes to continued inequities in educational opportunities which contribute to socio-economic inequalities between Blacks and Whites.

Across the country school systems are concerned with issues regarding educational inequity and are working to address all types of achievement gaps that exist between students based on race, gender, class, language and ability. This study focuses on inequities based on race.

Part II: Theoretical Perspectives

This section of the chapter examines contemporary perspectives for understanding the racial achievement gap. These include deficit theories, oppositional or resistance theories, critical and socioeconomic theories, and theories of cultural relevancy, teacher expectations and care. The first three perspectives attempt to explain achievement disparities between Black and White students by situating the problem in individuals, structures, or institutions. Although I discuss each of these perspectives separately, there are many overlapping characteristics among them. One similarity is the implicit idea that Black student underachievement is a function of Black cultural characteristics. In contrast to these perspectives, the last perspective, theories of cultural relevancy, teacher expectations and care, does not focus primarily on causality. Instead, it emphasizes the roles and responsibilities that teachers have in addressing racial achievement gaps in schools. In the next section I will discuss research literature from each perspective, the

implications of each perspective for addressing the AP gap, and the way each has informed the conceptual framework of this study.

Deficit Theories

Deficit theories for understanding the achievement gap assume that children, in this case Black students, lack the knowledge and skills necessary for school achievement because of cultural, biological, environmental, or social deficiencies. This view deemphasizes the political nature of schooling and assumes that schools are value-free, serve their students equally, and are meritocratic in nature (Irvine, 1990; Valencia, 1997). Within the deficit discourse, Black students' educational underachievement is explained as a consequence of their home cultures; Black students are not motivated, come from cultures that do not support achievement or are just biologically or genetically less capable than their White and Asian counterparts.

In *The Bell Curve* (1994), Herrnstein and Murray demonstrate ideas typical in deficit theories. They argue that the world may be divided into five cognitive classes based on measures of intelligence like IQ scores. As the title of the book implies, this distribution falls into a bell curve. Half of all people, the "normals", belong to Class III. On one end of the curve are the extremely intelligent, Class I or the "cognitive elite", and on the other end the extremely unintelligent, Class V or the "very dull". These two groups each comprise about 5% of the population. Using logistic regression analysis of IQ scores and a variety of characteristics including race, social class, crime rates and unemployment, Herrnstein and Murray suggest that IQ scores have reliable statistical relationships with social phenomenon. Like eugenicists of the early 20th century, they

contend that intelligence is a strong predictor of social behavior. According to Herrnstein and Murray (1994),

> …a society with a higher mean IQ is also likely to be a society with fewer social ills and brighter economic prospects, and that the most efficient way to raise the IQ of a society is for smarter women to have higher birth rates than duller women. Instead, America is going in the opposite direction, and the implication is a future America with more social ills and gloomier economic prospects" (p. 548).

They attribute social problems to groups of people with low measures of intelligence. Furthermore, Herrnstein and Murray found that there was a substantial difference in cognitive ability distributions between Blacks and Whites.

Herrnstein and Murray (1994) consistently suggest that while an individual's IQ does not determine their behavior and that "a person should not be judged as a member of a group but as an individual" (p. 550), people with low measures of intelligence are more likely to engage in socially inappropriate behaviors. This finding is linked to another that, on average, Black IQ scores were significantly lower than Whites at every level of socioeconomic status. The implication is that if Blacks typically have lower IQs than Whites and low measures of intelligence are linked to social impropriety, then in general Blacks are more likely to be unemployed, drop out of school, have illegitimate children and engage in a whole host of other socially inappropriate behaviors. Perhaps where they may differ from eugenicists is that they claim not to support theories of biological determinism. Instead they believe that it's "highly likely that both genes and environment have something to do with racial differences" (p. 311).

The arguments posed in *The Bell Curve* (1994) and the "science" on which it is based has been the object of much criticism since its publication. Some have accused Herrnstein and Murray of being racist and classist (Davis, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Gresson 1996). Others have critiqued the methodologies they employed to analyze data, suggesting that they manipulated data to support their argument (Gould, 1998; Nisbett, 1995). Regardless of these critiques, Herrnstein and Murray's work is laced with deficit-based models for understanding racial differences. The resounding message of *The Bell Curve* is that the Black-White achievement gap is attributable to the fact that, on average, Black children are simply less intelligent, because of genetic and cultural deficiencies, than White children.

One of the most prominent studies to use a cultural deficit perspective was conducted by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1965). In his study of a Puerto Rican family and their experiences living in poverty in San Juan and New York, Lewis was among the first to use and define the concept of "culture of poverty". He made the argument that poverty must be understood as a culture, with its own structure and rationale. According to Lewis, "the culture of poverty in modern nations is not only a matter of economic deprivation, of disorganization or the absence of something. It is also something positive and provides some rewards without which the poor could hardly carry on" (p. xliii). One example he used was adoption of low aspirations among poor Puerto Ricans. Lewis argued that this protected them from the frustrations associated with economic and social marginalization. Similar to oppositional and resistance perspectives, Lewis suggests that low expectations protect the poor from disappointments. As such, the culture of poverty is shaped by adaptation. Understanding this culture means deconstructing the ways the

poor react and adapt to their marginal positions in highly stratified, capitalist societies. The assumptions behind this theoretical perspective are that the poor are culturally deficit and that their behaviors, while emerging perhaps as a result of the very conditions in which they live, are passed down from one generation to the next. These culturally deficit behaviors are also largely responsible for the continuance of their condition.

Lewis's analysis of the way poor people of color cope with their condition may have some legitimacy in explaining behaviors among youth in schools, for example, their avoidance of rigorous courses like AP. However, it can also be employed by school personnel to justify the AP gap. If school personnel believe that Black students, whether because of race or class, have a culture of poverty that influences their participation and achievement in AP classes, they may also believe that there is little they can do to change the situation. They may even believe that attempting to change this culture, in efforts to support their academic achievement, could be socially detrimental to them outside of schools.

In her study of Black students in Boston, Lori Dance (2002) uncovered a similar coping mechanism. Students engaged in what she called "tough fronts" to survive the dangerous communities in which they lived. She suggested that, absent any understanding of the lived experiences of students outside of schools, school personnel often interpreted these tough fronts from deficit perspectives. Black students' street culture, important to their survival outside of schools, when brought into schools contributed to teacher attitudes and beliefs that students were not interested in academic achievement and were incapable of high achievement. In a related research study by Muller, Katz, & Dance (1999), the researchers also found that student behaviors, like the

tough fronts displayed by the Boston students, can influence teachers' attitudes toward students. They make the argument that students' low achievement and behavior perceived as inappropriate contribute, in part, to teacher low expectations of students. Additionally, teacher low expectations of students further fuels student disengagement. This vicious cycle of teacher low expectations and student disengagement from school and learning contributes to Black student underachievement.

However, Dance (2002) found that when teachers engage in culturally relevant or responsive interactions with students they can reverse this cycle. Teachers who develop cultural understandings about students' lived experiences outside of schools and emphasize high expectations for students in schools are more likely to develop productive teacher-student relationships that support student learning. Dance demonstrates this possibility in her case study of Ms. Bronzic. According to Dance, one of the secrets of her success was that she engaged in culturally responsive interactions with her street savvy students. Recognizing that her students' street culture influenced their postures both in and out of school, Ms. Bronzic never saw her students as deficient and consistently maintained high expectations for their achievement. Her story is an example of how teachers and other school personnel can break the cycle of deficit thinking to support student achievement and success in schools.

Deficit perspectives based on race and class are not located solely in schools. There are many Black leaders, like comedian Bill Cosby and president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Freeman Habrowski, who espouse deficit perspectives. Over the last few years Cosby, in some ways reminiscent of Booker T. Washington a century earlier, has been traveling the country arguing that Black people need to fix the

problems in their own communities and stop looking to others for the answers. In May 2005 he was a featured speaker at an event in Washington, D.C. commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown decision. At that event Cosby stated that the problems with the Black community lie in the fact that they don't take responsibility for their economic status, blame police for incarcerations and teach their kids poor speaking habits. Cosby said:

> They're (Black children) standing on the corner and they can't speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk: 'Why you ain't,' 'Where you is' ... And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. And then I heard the father talk. ... Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. ... You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth!
>
> (WorldNet, 2004)

Two years later Cosby returned to the Washington, D. C. area on a nationwide tour "A Call Out with Cosby" which was designed to spark debate about family and educational issues within Black communities. In a speech at the University of the District of Columbia, which was well received by the predominantly Black audience, Cosby told a forum on family and education that Blacks should be proactive and fix their own communities (Hunt, 2006). Cosby's rhetoric in part relies on deficit models: the idea that the behaviors, attitudes, and culture of Blacks are incompatible with academic achievement and socio-economic advancement. For Cosby, Black students achieve at lower levels than White students in America's education system because they are culturally deficient.

Another Black leader, Freeman Hrabowski, has spent much of his professional career studying minority student achievement and addressing the achievement gap between minority and White students. He has focused special attention on the under-representation of Black students in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering. A key outcome of his efforts was the creation in 1988 of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program for high-achieving minority students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC); a predominantly White, public research university founded in 1966. Despite his acknowledgement that structural barriers exist for Black students trying to attend college and achieve academic excellence, Hrabowski argues, like Cosby, that many Blacks do not have the cultural values necessary to succeed academically. In an interview in the Washington Post Magazine he said, "I'm talking about values like hard work, respect for authority and willingness to listen to teachers. Many (Black) parents don't know how important these things are" (Chenoweth, 2002, p. 14). According to Hrabowski, Black cultural deficiency is to blame for Black student underachievement.

Another Black deficit theorist of some notoriety is John McWhorter. In *Losing the Race* (2000), McWhorter draws primarily on anecdotal evidence from his experiences as a professor at Berkeley to argue that there exists within the Black community a *cult of anti-intellectualism* (p. 125). According to McWhorter, it is this "cultural trait that is the driving factor in depressing black scholarly performance" (p. 124). McWhorter argued against theories that emphasize the role of institutional racism, whether historical or contemporary, in explaining the racial achievement gap that exists. He analyzed standardized test data (SAT scores), socioeconomic statistics, and data on higher education admissions to support his assertions. He found that in 1995, the mean SAT

scores of Black students nationwide from families making $50,000 was 849 as compared

to 869 among White students from families earning $10,000 or less. Using these data he

refutes the "black is poor" lens that he believes dominates the discourse on the

underachievement of Black students. According to McWhorter, Black under-achievement

is not correlated to socio-economic status, but rather is influenced by Black cultural

characteristics. McWhorter describes anecdotal stories about his experiences with Black

college students to affirm his deficit theory regarding their academic underachievement.

According to McWhorter, whether in college or in K-12 schooling, "these students

belong to a culture infected with an Anti-intellectual strain, which subtly teaches them

from birth not to embrace schoolwork wholeheartedly" (p. 100). Again, whether this anti-

intellectualism is a product of resistance to perceived White cultural norms or an innate

cultural characteristic, McWhorter suggests that it is a deficiency among Black students

that likely contributes to the racial achievement gap.

Another pair of researchers who have argued that the culture of Black students

does not value academic achievement is Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom (2003). In *No

Excuses,* one of their main arguments is that, "Culture matters- that which informs

school, and that which students bring to school" (p. 83). They contend that in order to

close the racial achievement gap in learning, attention must be focused on transforming

the cultures of students that affect their academic achievement. They argue that cultural

patterns vary systematically with social class and region and along racial and ethnic lines.

The Thernstroms argue that White and Asian students achieve at higher levels than Black

students because of cultural differences between the groups. Furthermore, they suggest

that if Black students adopt the cultural traits demonstrated by "achieving" groups the

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gap can be closed. According to the Thernstroms, "Asian immigrants, for instance, generally arrive in this country with a 'tool kit' that gives them an advantage in their drive for education and prosperity in their adopted country" (p. 80). They posit that closing the achievement gap for Black students would involve equipping Black students with a similar cultural tool kit. Inherent in their message and typical of this perspective for understanding racial achievement gaps, is that the culture of Black students is deficient and this deficiency is responsible for their under-achievement.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric surrounding Asian American success in America has been critically analyzed as a myth by some researchers (Chun, 1980; Sue & Okazaki, 1995). Chun (1980) traced the evolution and prevalence of the "model minority" myth throughout the second half of the 1960s amidst the turmoil of the civil rights movements in this country. In her analysis of the portrayals of Asian Americans as a hard working, successful group in both the mass print media and social science literature she suggested that these images, which she claimed were typically "accompanied by invidious comparisons to Blacks" (p. 96), have functioned as a tool of political exploitation to divert attention away from racial inequities and problems in society and further victimize Blacks as a failing group. Chun argued that representations of Asians Americans as an industrious, hard working, uncomplaining group willing to "do something" instead of "sitting around moaning" permeated the media and research literature to create a myth that has also had serious consequences for them occupationally, educationally, and personally.

The Thernstroms (2003) relied on this myth in their argument that Asians have cultural characteristics that correlate with academic success. They wrote:

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It is, of course, a neat trick to 'experience racism' and yet escape being

stereotyped as inferior; the two usually go hand-in-hand. In fact, Asian-American

academic success has nothing to do with racism. And it has nothing to do with the

power of Whites to determine the status of groups…Asian children typically do

extraordinarily well in school for one reason: family culture- the culture that has a

Chinese mother expressing bewilderment at the idea that she should be her child's

'friend'. (p. 84)

The Thernstroms argued that since the problem of the underachievement of Black

students is cultural and not genetic or innate, it can be changed. They highlight examples

in their book of "terrific schools that serve highly disadvantaged minority kids," terrific

because "no excuses is their relentless message" (p. 4). According to the Thernstroms,

these schools were effective in lowering the racial achievement gap because they

established and taught students social norms associated with academic achievement:

speaking politely to adults, dressing neatly, arriving to school on time, paying attention in

class and finishing homework. They posited that "these are essential ingredients in the

definition of effective education for high-needs kids" (p.4). As a result, one of their

recommendations is that schools aim to transform the deficit cultures of academically

underachieving Black (and Latino) students.

Deficit perspectives for understanding the Black-White AP gap suggest that Black

students are responsible for their under-achievement. They argue that Black students do

not participate in AP classes either because they are, on average, less intelligent than

White students or do not embrace the value of AP courses for access to higher-education

and eventually increased social mobility. School personnel who engage in deficit thinking

about students based on race and/ or class may be contributing to achievement gaps between Black and White students. Deficit thinking impedes the establishment of productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships that support student achievement. Schools that are interested in increasing the participation and achievement of Black students in AP courses must explore the extent to which deficit thinking may be influencing the nature of relationships between school personnel and Black students and their families. This study explores the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents in order to better understand the nature of relationships among them.

Another perspective about the achievement gap I considered is closely connected to deficit perspectives. The research literature suggests that deficit-based interactions between teachers and students often result in negative schooling outcomes for Black students. One of the possible negative outcomes is the development of opposition or resistance to school and schooling.

Oppositional and Resistance Theories

Underlying oppositional and resistance theories is the idea that underachievement is socially constructed. According to Erickson (1987), when we look at groups of students who are not performing up to par with their peers on achievement tests and use that as evidence that they are not learning:

…what we mean is that they are not learning what school authorities, teachers, and administrators intend for them to learn as a result of intentional instruction. Learning what is deliberately taught can be seen as a form of political assent. Not learning can be seen as a form of political resistance. (pp. 343-344)

Proponents of this perspective emphasize the agency that children have in the construction of their underachievement. Oppositional theories attempt to explain how working class and other marginalized youth struggle against the norms or authority of schools that they believe are working against their best interests. Rather than represent Black and Latino students as victims of inequitable structures, systems, and discriminatory teachers who may be operating from deficit-based theories, they push the idea that these students have agency in resisting mainstream educational culture. They suggest that these students may choose to withdraw from schooling, and in particular rigorous AP courses, and construct an "oppositional culture" that runs counter to mainstream educational values (Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Willis, 1977).

> According to Erickson (1987), assent to the exercise of authority involves trust:
> …trust in the legitimacy of the authority and in the good intentions of those exercising it, trust that one's own identity will be maintained positively in relation to the authority, and trust that one's own interests will be advanced by compliance with the exercise of authority. (p. 344)

Erickson argued that legitimacy, trust and interest were institutional and existential phenomena. As institutional phenomena they were embedded within social structures and relationships. As existential phenomena they were "continuously negotiated within the intimate circumstance and short time scale of everyday encounters between individual teachers, students, and parents" (p. 345). Erickson suggested that the institutional legitimacy of schools is affirmed existentially through social interactions between school personnel and students and their parents. When students perceive that their cultural

identities, whether based on race, ethnicity, class or otherwise, are being compromised by schools, and their agents, again perhaps as a result of deficit-based ideologies, the result often manifests itself in resistant, or oppositional, behaviors.

Two prominent studies that rely on oppositional and resistance theories to understand student behaviors, attitudes toward, and achievement in schools have been done by Peter McLaren (1985) and Paul Willis (1977). McLaren mined for the oppositional potential of micropolitical acts in schools in his conceptualization of rituals as cultural productions of student resistance. He described the concept *rituals of resistance* through an analysis of the behaviors of the class clown in a Catholic junior high-school in Toronto, Ontario. According to McLaren:

> Rituals of resistance are often attempts at "purifying" the contaminated and fragmented world of institutionalized social structure. They may be aptly described as a type of ceremonial "destructuring". Hidden grudges and tensions are mobilized for the purpose of rupturing the culturally axiomatic rules of the school and subverting the grammars of mainstream classroom discourse. (p. 86)

McLaren argued that clowning was the ritualized resistance of working class boys to the authority of their teachers and instruction, and the norms of the school. In his ethnography of schooling, *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) attempted to illustrate how the resistance to school of a group of young working-class males in England reproduced the social order outside of schools. Willis contextualized the behaviors of the young boys, or *lads*, within the economic condition of their social class position but argued that their oppositional culture is not a consequence of structural determinations or dominant ideologies. Instead, he argued that they repudiated schooling because they perceived it as

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meaningless with regards to future employment prospects. This led to the development of a subculture among the lads based on nonconformist cultural innovations.

Giroux (1983) and Walker (1985) were critical of Willis' application of resistance theory in understanding the lads. Giroux cautioned against labeling all acts of opposition in schools as resistance. Acts of resistance, unlike opposition, require some critique of school-constructed ideologies and power relations. He suggested that understanding resistance required an analysis of the potential resistors' explanations of their own behavior within the context of complex social relations in which they are embedded. Walker (1985) also questioned Willis' analysis of the boys' behavior, or counter-school culture, as "actually or potentially, consciously or unconsciously, contributing to progressive social change by undermining the production of oppressive social structures and social relations" (p. 65). Walker argued that Willis' use of the term *resistance* to characterize the boy's behaviors is "tendentious" and that Willis did not provide adequate evidence to demonstrate that "the lads' behavior has this kind of thrust" (p. 65). Walker proposed the use of the term *recusancy* to describe the lads' behavior, drawing on the idea that rather than attempting to transform an entire system, as is associated with the term *resistance,* they may actually have just been refusing to acknowledge established authority.

Abowitz (2000) critiqued resistance theorists like McLaren and Willis who, she argued, analyzed student resistance in schools and schooling from interactionist perspectives, or in terms of the interactions that occur between two separate entities in causal reaction. From a pragmatic perspective she suggested that resistance as communication is a process of meaning construction and of building discourse around

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problems of exclusion or inequality. According to Abowitz, an interactionist lens limits the practical uses of resistance theory to understand and respond to student resistance in schools. Abowitz, building on the theoretical work of Giroux, proposed the use of a more ecological or transactional theory of inquiry that included an investigation of all relevant actors, histories and contexts. According to Abowitz:

> Transactional understandings of communication view that process as more than a causal exchange of information between two or more people or groups, more than the stimulus and response reactions between oppressed and oppressor. The idea of transaction signals how communicative actions change all actors undergoing a communicative experience, despite the fact that communication is never "pure" but constantly moving through and in subjective interpretations and cultural contexts… Resistance, I argue, is a complex form of human communication. (p. 880)

She argued for the use of transactionalism as a theoretical construct for understanding resistance as a communicative process. Abowitz insisted that resistance is a "potentially valuable expression" and should be conceptualized as a source of inquiry into practices that silence and exclude students rather than as "an obstruction to be beaten down" (p. 902).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) also argued for a more holistic approach to understanding student resistance. Despite the existence of a racial achievement gap in education, they argued that within the group classified as "underachieving" are minority students who are not "resisting." They employed a *cultural-ecological theory* to explain the differences in school achievement between two groups identified as voluntary and

involuntary minorities. Ogbu and Simons suggested that differences in achievement among minorities cannot be understood without some understanding of the ways in which each community responded to collective problems. Similar to Dance (2002), they argue that these responses needed to be understood within the context of the historical experiences and lived realities of each group. "Ecology" refers to the setting or the environment and "cultural" to the ways people perceive their world and live in it. In the cultural-ecological theory, they considered broad societal and school factors as well as the dynamics within minority communities in developing understandings about the underachievement of minority students in schools.

The cultural-ecological theory suggests that schools reproduce societal inequalities and that this occurs on two levels. The first is *the system,* made up of educational policies, pedagogy, and rewards for credentials, particularly in the form of employment opportunities. Understanding the system and how it affects minority school achievement requires an investigation into the *collective problems* faced by minority groups (i.e., discrimination). The second level involves *community forces*, or the way minorities perceive and respond to schooling as a consequence of their treatment. This may be understood through examination of the *collective solutions*, or responses to the collective problems.

Ogbu and Simons suggested that the development of oppositional identities, or resistance, is a common characteristic among involuntary minority groups in this country and not among voluntary minority groups. They argued that the reason for this difference is rooted in the differing historical experiences of these two groups. Involuntary minority groups have experiences with discrimination and racism in America. As a result they

often perceive the normative socialization processes of schooling as a threat to their identities and do not necessarily see connections between school and upward social mobility in terms of high wage employment. From a pragmatic perspective, they suggested that this theory had pedagogical implications for teachers interested in supporting the academic achievement of Black students including the need to: build trust, engage in culturally responsive instruction, deal with opposition and ambivalence in explicit ways, have high expectations and standards for student achievement, and develop productive relationships with parents. These pedagogical implications are discussed in more detail in the last section of this chapter and inform the conceptual framework of this study.

Another significant issue Ogbu (2003) explored regarding resistance is the fear among Black students of being labeled by their peers as "acting White."[2] In his study of Black student disengagement in Shaker Heights, he found that peer pressure was a factor working against students' participation and achievement in AP courses. When asked why they avoided taking rigorous high school courses, the Black students in his study repeatedly shared that they did not want to be accused by their peers of trying to be White. These students wanted to fit in socially with their Black peers.

Clinical psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) explained the complexities of adolescent identity development among Black students in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* While all adolescents struggle with questions of identity and this struggle is not necessarily centered on race, Tatum argued that for Black

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[2] "Acting White" theories regarding the underachievement of African American students have been promoted by both John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham. They have studied and written about this phenomenon together as well as on their own. For the purposes of this literature review I have centered my discussion on Ogbu's work, acknowledging however that Fordham has also contributed to this theoretical perspective. References of her work contributing to this perspective have been cited.

children race becomes a salient factor in their identity development because it is a salient issue in society. According to Tatum:

> Why do Black youths, in particular, think about themselves in terms of race? Because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we receive from those around us, and when young Black men and women enter adolescence, the racial content of those messages intensifies. (pp.53-54)

Tatum suggested that peer groups are particularly important for Black adolescents as they developed their racial identities. As race becomes personally salient for them, peer groups seem to hold the answers to their questions about what it means to be Black. As with all adolescents, Black students want to fit in and be accepted by their peers. For the Black students in Ogbu's study, social acceptance took priority over enrollment in rigorous high school courses and academic achievement.

There is, however, a growing body of literature and research that challenges Ogbu's theory. *Beyond Acting White* (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006) is a collection of essays that attempted to wrestle with Ogbu's "acting White" explanation and reframe the debate on black student achievement. The authors problematized the acting-White hypothesis by contending that it: fails to capture race as a social phenomenon, serves to homogenize the Black experience, and neglects the significance of social context in human behavior. They argued that Ogbu, in attempting to examine the relationship between black identity and achievement, treated race as a variable and in doing so failed to deconstruct its phenomenological and operational meanings. In the introduction, O'Connor, Horvat, and Lewis write:

When race is operationalized in this way, we lose sight of black heterogeneity,

including the diverse ways by which individuals make sense of what it means to

be black. We underconceptualize how 'blackness' intersects with class, gender,

and ethnic identities. Further, we limit our analyses to how 'blackness' is reflected

in the meanings students bring with them to school and other institutions and

simultaneously silence the meanings that are imposed on black students by

institutional structures (including schools) and their agents. And the near-

unilateral focus on making sense of 'blackness' in this literature also stops short

of examining how the social construction of 'Whiteness' is simultaneously

implicated in the achievement performance of black students. (p. 15)

A chapter by Mickelson & Velasco focused on high achievers in the Charlotte-

Mecklenburg, North Carolina school district. The 22 Black students in their study took

primarily AP and/ or IB courses, the most rigorous courses available to high school

students. Their goal was to find out from these students why academically able Black

students might elect to take courses below their ability level. They found three categories

of responses to their questions about why Black students were not in AP courses:

1) Students wanted to avoid hard work, and their parents, teachers, and counselors
   were not pushing them hard enough;

2) The tracking structures in schools translated into small numbers of Black students
   in high level courses and taking them ultimately meant the risk of social isolation;

3) Students might be discouraged by the fear of being labeled acting White.

Mickelson and Velasco found that the most common response was the first one; that most

students did not want to be challenged and did not want to work hard.

This conclusion might lead critics to suggest that Mickelson and Velasco are engaged in deficit thinking. Rather, in reconsidering Ogbu's theories, they examined intersections of race, school structure, and individual difference in order to challenge the dichotomy created by Ogbu's work about either the presence or absence of acting White in schools. They argued that most students, regardless of race, seek less challenging classes:

> High school students are pragmatic when considering the commitment required in high-level courses. Our interviewees said that AP and IB classes are seen as difficult and beyond the intellectual reach of most students, black and White. Because they are concerned about college entrance standards, many students do not want to jeopardize their grade-point average by moving into a more challenging course level where their grades may suffer. (p. 36)

The Black students in their study did, however, have direct experiences with sanctions from their peers that can come with academic achievement. Despite this, they continued to take rigorous high school courses and do well academically. Mickelson and Velasco's study revealed that there were some common experiences that contributed to students' participation and achievement. Among these were supportive relationships with friends, parents and teachers. The students talked about the importance of these relationships for their emotional and intellectual well-being, especially in overcoming the stigma of "acting White" that was often assigned to them by their peers. Another important factor for their success was the organizational context of learning. Many of the students in their study had been labeled by the school system as "gifted" during elementary school and tracked into high level courses. Academic tracking systems put these students on early

paths to academic success. Being in high-level tracks supported their continued achievement in terms of access to challenging curricula and opportunities to learn in environments characterized by high expectations.

The study by Mickelson and Velasco is important for a variety of reasons. While some of their findings are consistent with Ogbu's theory that Black students resist academic achievement as a result of the fear of being labeled "acting White," they also suggested that the "acting White" model is too narrow in focus and fails to account for variations in students' responses to social and academic pressures. This study is significant because it challenges the determinism of the "acting White" theory. As their evidence demonstrates, not all Black students responded to the acting-White epithet by withdrawing from academics. Drawing on the voices of Black AP students, this study highlights the heterogeneity of the black experience, the complexity of students' lives in schools and the nuanced ways in which race and achievement are institutionalized.

Despite the various theories represented within this perspective, a major theme is that students have agency in their behaviors and attitudes towards schools and schooling. Unlike other theories discussed in this chapter, resistance and oppositional theories consider the political meanings of students' behaviors and underachievement and suggest that Black student under-representation and under-achievement in AP courses may be attributed to deliberate actions of opposition or resistance to dominant ideologies and practices in schools and society. My interest in what schools are doing to increase Black student participation in AP courses led me to explore, from students' perspectives, the various factors that influenced their decisions to take these courses. Similar to the

findings of Mickelson and Velasco (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006), I found little evidence of opposition or resistance to taking AP courses among Black students.

The next perspective I considered, unlike the deficit and oppositional and resistance perspectives, interrogates conditions primarily outside of schools that influence the Black-White AP gap in schools. However, since experiences both in and out of school are socially constructed, there is overlap among these three perspectives. Deficit-based thinking among school personnel is influenced by social understandings of inequality in society at large. And as mentioned before, opposition and resistance among students are not solely reactions to schooling experiences but also to the dominant ideologies of society.

Critical and Socioeconomic Theories

Critical and socioeconomic theories for understanding the under-achievement of Black students center on analysis of ideological, racial, and socioeconomic inequities in society and the relationship of societal inequities on student achievement. Proponents of this perspective argue that social inequities, which may in part be attributable to deficit-based ideologies, work to create and sustain a status quo in which the ideas and economic prosperity of particular groups are privileged at the expense of others. Operating in a dialectical relationship, social conditions established outside of schools reinforce people's world views and norms, are reproduced in schools, and continue to support the existing status quo. Inequities in society reproduced in schools implicitly contribute to differential outcomes as evidenced by the academic achievement gap among students from diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Underlying this perspective is an assumption that schools cannot address the underachievement of Black students without redress of

broader ideological, racial, and socioeconomic inequality that exist in society. According to Anyon (1997), educational reform and social reform go hand in hand.

Much of the literature that suggests that socioeconomic inequity contributes to educational disparities between students from different social class positions and racial or ethnic backgrounds is based in critical theory. According to critical theorists, ideological hegemony is created by dominant groups as part of a greater effort to maintain the status quo. The power of dominant groups is maintained through the endorsement and reinforcement of oppressive ideological practices (McLaren, 2003). Schools are not neutral spaces but are actually political in nature and serve the interests of dominant groups, or those who benefit from the status quo (Freire & Macedo, 1987). As sites of social reproduction, school policies and practices reproduce societal inequalities and legitimate dominant norms through the socialization of students. Empirical studies support this critical theory perspective. One practice in particular that has been shown to contribute to social reproduction in schools is "tracking," or the sorting of students by ability. In a national study of secondary school tracking, Oakes (1985) found that learning in low tracks rarely consisted of the development of skills requisite for moving into higher tracks and instead ensured that students would remain in those low tracks. Twenty years later, Carbonaro (2005) found that higher track classes were characterized by higher quality instruction which leads to greater learning outcomes for the students in them.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) builds on critical theory by emphasizing the significance of race and racism in discussions of Black student underachievement. CRT is a counter-discourse generated by legal scholars of color as a race-based critique of law

and society (Lynn, 1999). Critical race theorists in the mid 1980s criticized the racialized nature of the law and the ways in which it seemed to privilege White people. CRT challenges the experiences of White European Americans as the normative standard and argues that because racism is institutionalized in political and legal structures and prevalent in American society, the law can neither uphold principles of social justice in theory nor in practice. By the 1990s, education scholars began to use CRT to explain inequalities in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

According to Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw (1993), there are six unifying themes that define the movement. Essential to critical race theory is the recognition that racism is endemic in American society; it challenges claims that America functions as a colorblind meritocracy. In their review of CRT literature since 1995, Dixson & Rousseau (2005) analyzed one of the central tenets of CRT in legal studies, "voice", and the ways in which this construct has been applied to educational research. The authors found that attention to voice has been employed in educational research to highlight and emphasize the perspectives and views of students of color on a variety of issues related to schooling at both the K-12 and higher education levels. They state:

> This literature reveals both individual-level 'microaggressions' in the form of lowered teacher expectations as well as more macro-level forms of institutional racism in which school- wide programs lack the courses and rigor necessary for students to succeed in higher education. (p. 12)

Dixson and Rousseau argue that while these "stories" of students of color are important, stories alone are not enough. They argue that:

Rather, the educational experiences revealed through those stories must then be subject to deeper analysis using the CRT lens. Furthermore, CRT mandates that social activism be a part of any CRT project. To that end, the stories must move us to action and the qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of color. (p. 13)

This study, while investigating what schools are doing to address the AP gap, also focuses on the stories of Black students and their parents and their perceptions of school programs, policies, and practices. Fundamental to this research is the incorporation of these often silenced voices in an analysis of school reform efforts to address the AP gap.

While the CRT foregrounds race in an analysis of educational inequality, others who work out of critical theory traditions emphasize the role of social class. One such scholar is Richard Rothstein (2004). In *Class and Schools*, Rothstein considered the ways in which social and economic manifestations of children's class position had implications for learning in schools. Among these manifestations were differences in access to health care and adequate housing. According to Rothstein:

Lower-class children, on average, have poorer vision than middle-class children, partly because of prenatal conditions, partly because of how their eyes are trained as infants. They have poorer hygiene, more lead poisoning, more asthma, poorer nutrition, less adequate pediatric care, more exposure to smoke, and a host of other problems…each of these well-documented social differences is likely to have a palpable effect on academic achievement, and, combined, the influence of all these differences is probably huge. (p. 3)

Unlike Lewis' culture of poverty theory, Rothstein does not highlight class differences to suggest that the disadvantaged are culturally deficient as a result of their disadvantage. Instead, his purpose is to emphasize that the influence of social class characteristics like inadequate access to health care and housing are probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome them no matter how well trained teachers are or how well curricula are designed. In contrast to deficit perspectives, Rothstein suggests that in a society characterized by extreme social stratification where some people have access to more resources and are afforded greater opportunities regarding high quality education, educational researchers and reformers should not ignore how social class may influence learning in school. He urges that three avenues be pursued "vigorously and simultaneously" in order to make progress in narrowing the gap and addressing Black student underachievement (p. 8). These avenues include: 1) raising the quality of instruction in schools, 2) expanding the definition of schooling to include early childhood, after-school and summer programs, and 3) creating social and economic policies that enable children to attend school more equally ready to learn what schools expect of them.

The idea that social class position impacts educational opportunities has been the subject of a multitude of research reports over the last decades and may have received increased attention beginning with the Coleman Report in 1966. As part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a Congressional mandate was issued requiring the Commissioner of Education to conduct a survey and make a report to the President and Congress regarding "the lack of educational opportunities available for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United

States, its territories and possessions and the District of Columbia" (Coleman et al., 1966, p. iii). The purpose was to outline and highlight prevailing inequalities so that they could be addressed in accordance with the provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel approached sociologist James Coleman of Johns Hopkins University to address the elementary and secondary education components of the survey in 1965. The sample included about 600,000 students, 60,000 teachers, and 3,100 schools across the nation. The study was designed to systematically measure the types of inputs that impact educational outputs.

The Coleman Report was particularly significant because of its influence on public discourse in education regarding the nature of equal educational opportunities. According to Wong and Nicotera (2004), "the Coleman report not only reshaped the ways in which social scientists design and conduct research but it transformed how educators think about the purpose of education and significantly informed the policy arena" (p. 126). The findings of the Coleman report validated and in many ways were used to support the ruling in *Brown* for the desegregation of public schools. The report found that while school resources, including facilities, curriculum and teacher quality do not show significant effects on student achievement, the social composition of schools did have a significant effect. By social composition, Coleman was referring to the student body's educational background and aspirations, as they related to racial composition. According to Coleman:

> This means that the apparent beneficial effect of a student body with a high
> proportion of White students comes not from racial composition per se, but from

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better educational background and higher educational aspirations that are, on

average found among White students. (p. 307)

Rothstein (2004) also made an argument about averages. He maintained that since

social class differences are likely to affect the academic performance of children, much of

the difference between the average performances of Black and White children can

probably be traced to differences in their social class characteristics. According to

Rothstein, parents from different social classes often have different styles of childrearing,

including different ways of disciplining, communicating with or reading to their children.

He reasoned that different styles of childrearing impacted how ready children were to

learn when they entered school:

A five-year-old who enters school recognizing some words and who has turned

pages of many stories will be easier to teach than one who has rarely held a book.

The second child can be taught, but with equally high expectations and effective

teaching, the first will more likely pass a reading test than the second. So the

achievement gap begins. (p. 19)

However, he also pointed out that within any income range (poor, middle class, etc.)

students of color tended to be lower achieving than their White counterparts.

In addition to income gaps between racial groups, researchers have started to

examine the impact of wealth disparity. Looking at averages, Blacks have less *wealth*

than do Whites, regardless of income, education, and occupation. According to Oliver

and Shapiro (2000), income is how much money people make or earn through

employment and is measured over time, like an hourly or weekly wage. Wealth, however,

is a stock of assets that measures what people own:

Wealth signifies the command over financial resources that a family has

accumulated over its lifetime along with those resources that have been inherited

across generations. Such resources, when combined with income, can create the

opportunity to secure the "good life" in whatever form is needed- education,

business, training, justice, health, comfort, and so on. Wealth is a special form of

money not used to purchase milk and shoes…more often it is used to create

opportunities, secure a desired stature and standard of living, or pass class status

along to one's children. (p. 403)

The authors argued that racial differentials in wealth accumulation between Blacks and

Whites can best be understood by analyzing both historic and contemporary opportunity

structures within American society. They outlined three concepts in their analysis. The

first is *racialization of state policy,* referring to the way state policy has impaired the

ability of Blacks to accumulate wealth historically, beginning with slavery. The second

concept, or what they called *economic detour*, refers to the fact that after slavery Blacks

were restricted by law from participation in business in an open market. Jim Crow and

legalized segregation limited their opportunities to develop successful businesses by

preventing them from capitalizing on the White market. The third concept they outlined

was the *sedimentation of racial inequality* which describes the cumulative effects of the

past on Blacks and their status in the economic hierarchy today. According to Oliver and

Shapiro:

Generation after generation of blacks remained anchored to the lowest economic

status in American society. The effect of this inherited poverty and economic

scarcity for the accumulation of wealth has been to "sediment" inequality into the

social structure. The sedimentation of inequality occurred because the investment

opportunity that blacks faced worked against their quest for material self-

sufficiency. In contrast, Whites in general, but well-off Whites in particular, were

able to amass assets and use their secure financial status to pass their wealth from

generation to generation. What is often acknowledged is that the same social

system that fosters the accumulation of private wealth for many Whites denies it

to blacks, thus forging an intimate connection between White wealth

accumulation and black poverty. (p. 404)

Oliver and Shapiro find that an analysis of wealth and the structures that provide access

to wealth are more meaningful for understanding the differential access to life chances

experienced by Blacks and Whites than mere income differences.

Orr (2003) argues further that wealth is an indicator of both financial and human

capital and can affect academic achievement. Drawing on notions of social and cultural

capital used by Pierre Bourdieu, she described how wealth, as economic capital, can be

"cashed in" (p. 283) to access cultural capital. This can be measured by things like trips

to museums and symphony concerts and by more extravagant activities like vacations to

foreign countries. Wealth also manifests itself in human capital. According to Orr, human

capital includes resources that are available to expand an individual's opportunities.

Human capital differs between people with wealth and people with little or no wealth.

Orr illustrated this point with the following example:

One way in which wealthy parents may differ from less-wealthy parents is that

they may be more oriented toward and concerned about the future. This concern

may lead them to start planning for and investing assets for the future early

because they know that their present behavior may greatly affect their future

status. (p. 284)

Orr argued that access to financial capital is connected to access to social and human capital, which in turn is related to educational achievement. For Orr, this means that disparities in wealth between Blacks and Whites contribute greatly to the underachievement of Black students.

Orr's argument regarding the relationship between wealth and achievement is supported by empirical evidence. The data used in her analysis came from a subset of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) entitled *NLSY79 Mothers and Children,* consisting of approximately 3,000 women aged 14-21 in 1979 who had since that time become mothers. The women were interviewed annually from 1979 through 2002. The data also included information about their spouses and children. The data on the children were collected biannually since 1986 and derived from interviews with the mothers, interviews with the children, and various socioemotional, cognitive, and psychological assessments. The children in the sample ranged from ages five to 14, were either Black or White as reported by the mothers, and were all given the Mathematics portion of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) in 1996. The data also contained information obtained from school surveys, transcripts of interviews, and interviewers' observations of the children's home environments.

The dependent variable in Orr's analysis was academic achievement, for which she used the PIAT as a measure. The primary independent variables used were wealth, socioeconomic status (SES), and race. Wealth variables were created by adding the value of all household assets and subtracting household debt. SES was measured by three

variables: family income, parental education, and parental occupation. The mediating variables in the analyses were cultural capital, educational resources in the home, social capital, child self-esteem, and school quality. Using ordinary least-squares regression to test her hypotheses, Orr found that when no factors were considered other than race, Black students scored 8.34 points, or .6 standard deviations, below White students on the PIAT. However, when other factors were considered, Orr found that the influence of race decreased significantly, but did not disappear. With regards to SES, Orr found that achievement was higher for children whose parents had more years of schooling and worked in more prestigious occupations. The addition of wealth decreased the coefficient for race by 15 percent. Children from families with little or no wealth scored significantly lower than those from wealthier families, regardless of parents' income, education and occupation. Compared to other indicators of SES, wealth had the largest standardized effect on academic achievement of children in the sample.

Based on the work of Oliver and Shapiro (2000) and Orr (2003) it becomes apparent that issues of social class are intimately connected with issues of race in this country. According to Rothstein (2004), "Closing the gap would require social and economic reforms that would result in distributing African American and White students equally between the social classes" (p.18).

While these authors emphasized the intersections of race, income and wealth in reducing life chances for Blacks in this society, William Julius Wilson (1987) argued for a non-racialized construction of the problem of inequality. According to Wilson, it is unfair that some individuals are given every conceivable advantage while others never have a chance. In his discussion of the *Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson also urged a

restructuring of public policies based on the principle of equality of life chances. This approach, unlike affirmative action programs which target Blacks and other marginalized "racial and ethnic groups" and do not address the needs of poor Whites, would focus attention on the "truly disadvantaged" regardless of race or ethnicity. Wilson suggested that programs needed to be put in place that move beyond addressing equality of individual and group opportunity to equalize life chances for all by overcoming present class disadvantages. According to Wilson, shifting the focus from particular racial groups to the truly disadvantaged in general would not only help poor Whites, "but would also address more effectively the problems of the minority poor" (p. 118). He argued that affirmative action programs and other preferential treatment programs based on race tended to benefit middle- and upper-class Blacks and that poor Blacks were not benefiting from policies that function under the equality of individual or group opportunity principles.

In summary, the critical and socioeconomic theoretical perspectives for understanding the achievement gap critically analyze structures and institutions that exist outside of schools. These perspectives examine how social structures contribute to inequality in the development of wealth, social and cultural capital, and life chances for children from different social class positions and different racial backgrounds. While deficit theorists argue that the underachievement of Black students and/or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds is due to the cultural deficiencies of these groups of people, this perspective is critical of systems, structures and institutions in society that may be producing what Lewis calls, "cultures of poverty". Rather than view people as deficient, proponents of this perspective view social systems that neglect to provide

equitable access to basic human needs as deficient systems. Adherents to this perspective are typically skeptical of school reforms that claim to be interested in addressing the academic achievement gap. For them, the gap cannot be addressed without acknowledging and addressing the inequality that exists in society.

At issue, however, is the potential for school personnel to buy-in to the idea that inequality outside of schools is so powerful that there is nothing that can be done inside of schools to counteract their influence on students' achievement. What is even more disconcerting is that when these perspectives are combined with deficit perspectives about Black students and the belief that they oppose or resist schooling, the chances of addressing the AP gap in schools seems unlikely to occur. Despite the socioeconomic issues in the communities that surrounded the two schools in this study, neither school saw efforts to address the AP gap as fruitless. Both employed programs, policies, and practices in attempts to increase Black student participation and achievement in AP.

Theories of Cultural Relevancy, Teacher Expectations, and Care

The last perspective I considered regarding the academic achievement gap relies on an interrogation of the ways in which cultural relevancy, teacher expectations, and care influence student achievement. The research literature is replete with empirical evidence suggesting that attitudes, beliefs, and expectations are powerful factors that guide and direct teachers' responses toward students (Good & Brophy, 1987; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992) and that these responses may lead to differential treatment and expectations based on race/ethnicity (Guttmann & Bar-Tal, 1982; Rist, 1970), social class (Baron, Tom, & Cooper, 1985), and gender differences (Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1993). There is also evidence that suggests that teachers interact with and treat working and

lower-class parents differently than upper-middle-class parents (Laureau, 2000, Lightfoot, 1978; Rist, 1970). Boykin (1986) argued that cultural racism in society is manifested in the attitudes and actions of school personnel that contribute to differential treatment of children based on race. A major assumption that underlies this perspective is that students' learning is mediated through processes of cultural socialization, particularly in classroom contexts and as a result of relationships with their teachers. Proponents of this perspective for understanding the achievement gap argue that student achievement in many ways is dependent on productive social relationships in schools with teachers, relationships that are often defined by teachers' expectations of students.

Muller, Katz, and Dance (1999) used findings from three independent research studies to illustrate the powerful ways teacher expectations of students can influence teacher-student relationships and, in turn, influence student achievement in schools. They suggested that in order to develop better understandings of these relationships it was important to consider the perspectives of both teachers and students. They argued that most of the research on teacher expectations focused on the teachers' side of the dyad and that the voices and experiences of students are absent. The researchers argued that social relationships provided capital to individual actors, particularly students. Drawing on Coleman's (1988) theory of the role of social structures in the development of social capital, they argued that the mere existence of these structures or relationships does not necessarily guarantee the development of social capital. They reasoned that exploring the potential existence of social capital in teacher-student relationships required an analysis of factors that contribute to teachers' and students' decisions whether to invest in or disengage from the relationship. The researchers argued that the associations among

caring, expectations, and achievement appeared to be the basis for the growth and maintenance of social capital in the classroom.

The data from the three studies (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999) demonstrated that educational expectations, trust, and caring relationships between teachers and their students are inextricably linked to academic achievement and behavior. In each study the researchers analyzed how teachers' low expectations for students intersect with students' perceptions of teachers' caring and then evaluated the effect of this intersection on student outcomes. The quantitative analyses of the NELS data was used to illustrate both generalizability and broad trends in the connection between teachers' expectations, students' expectations, students' perceptions that the teacher cares, and academic achievement. The two qualitative studies were used to make more transparent the processes and conditions under which the statistical relationships existed. The authors acknowledged that it was difficult to establish a causal relationship in the association between teachers' and students' expectations because each played a primary role in shaping the other. They found that teachers in their samples had lower expectations of minority students, particularly Blacks, than White students. Additionally, they found that teachers constantly weighed factors in teacher-student relationships when deciding whether to invest time and energy in their students. Katz found that teachers often used three factors to evaluate students' chances of success: standardized test scores, classroom behavior, and susceptibility to peer pressure. They also found that like teachers, students considered effort when deciding whether to invest in a teacher. The students in Dance's study said that they were likely to invest in cooperative relationships with teachers if they thought that it would "pay off" in terms of receiving academic support and

encouragement (p. 314). The students identified the following characteristics of their favorite teachers: a good sense of humor, a pedagogical approach that is fun yet educational, an ability to motivate all students to work hard, fairness and accessibility, and an empathetic regard for students. The combined results from the teachers' and the students' perspectives suggested that the intersection of student and teacher educational expectations for the student is important in shaping teacher-student relationships.

Student descriptions of their favorite teachers and what they valued in their teachers provided insight into the processes students engaged in as they considered whether to invest in relationships with their teachers. The authors contended that disengagement occurs over time; even a student who appears to be disengaged will jump at an opportunity to invest when he or she perceives the odds to be favorable for learning. Yet even the most persistent student will stop trying when she or he concludes that the odds of achieving academically are insurmountable. This last finding is of particular significance in considering the ways in which teacher expectations contribute to student engagement and subsequent achievement in schools.

In his study of Shaker Heights, Ohio, Ogbu (2003) also explored the influence of teacher expectations on student disengagement from the students' perspective. He attempted to understand Black students' and the community's perceptions of, and responses to, the role of counselors and teachers in the academic achievement gap. Ogbu argued that, in Shaker Heights, race and not social class explained the academic disengagement of Black students. Ogbu found that Black students and their parents did not believe that counselors pushed or encouraged black students as much as they did White students to take honors and AP classes, serving as "gatekeepers" of these rigorous

courses, and often making it necessary for Black parents to intervene to enroll their children in those classes. Teachers were perceived as not caring about the academic success of Black students. Ogbu suggested that the lack of encouragement and low expectations of teachers towards Black students influenced these students' disengagement, but acknowledged the challenge of drawing definitive conclusions about the extent to which this may have actually been the case, given the difficulty of determining causality between teacher expectations and student performance using ethnographic research methods. According to Ogbu, "In more than 100 classroom lessons we observed, there were many instances in which it was difficult to say whether students were unwilling to do class work or homework or whether their refusal to do so resulted in low teacher expectations" (p.133). Ogbu suggested that based on students' accounts about their experiences and perceptions, teachers' lowered expectations may in fact contribute to some students' academic disengagement.

Despite his acknowledgement of the power of school factors in minority student disengagement from academic achievement, Ogbu proposed that the most effective way to address the under-achievement of minority students is to focus on the Black community's approach to education. He chastised the black middle class parents of Shaker Heights for not promoting the dispositions related to academic achievement among their children. Critics of Ogbu's work point to what they see as explicit deficit thinking in his understanding of the achievement gap between Black and White students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. They find parallels between his theories and culture of poverty theories (Lee, 2002; Lynn, 2006; Schwartz, 2003).

According to Lynn (2006), Ogbu is guilty of something many other social anthropologists have done: confusing cultural values and beliefs with those that are not culturally based. In assuming that education is not a Black cultural value, the implication is that Black parents do not invest in their children's education. Lynn also pointed out that this reasoning failed to take into account the powerful influence of in-school factors on students' different responses to school. However, Foley (2005) interpreted Ogbu's perspective differently when he wrote, "Ogbu makes a crucial distinction that separates him from deficit thinkers. In his perspective, the dysfunctional aspects of African American culture are adaptations not *inherent* cultural traits" (p. 648). Regardless of the controversy regarding interpretations of Ogbu's study, there is still the question of generalizability. The Shaker Heights ethnography was based in part on a small sample (only 28 students were interviewed) and the conclusions drawn from the data, as Schwartz (2003) points out, are highly subjective. Schwartz states, "Ogbu obviously had to choose which responses to highlight and which to downplay or ignore. But too often the reader must accept Ogbu's word that a particular opinion or belief is common in the community" (p. 133). Despite the criticisms, Ogbu's work contributes to the research literature that emphasizes the influence of teacher expectations on Black students' engagement and achievement in schools.

Another influential factor on teacher expectations of students has been the school accountability movement. In 2001 the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) whose aim was to address achievement gaps in elementary and secondary schools by ensuring that all students have a fair, equitable, and significant opportunity to attain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state

academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. NCLB established a comprehensive framework of standards, testing, and accountability absent in previous federal legislation. Not only is student testing mandatory, NCLB also required that results be disaggregated by students' race, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and ability. This requirement, among other things, reflected the concerns of lawmakers over the widening achievement gap among ethnic and linguistic subgroups in this country. The premise behind the act was that school accountability would produce better educational outcomes for all students.

NCLB's increased focus on school-based accountability was intended to lead policymakers and practitioners to focus on the importance of school actions in promoting student achievement and success in K-12 schooling. According to Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo (2005) the organizational and instructional reforms in schools that are critical to the success of school-level accountability are likely to have an effect on how well students are prepared to access and succeed in college. They argue that the long-term impact of NCLB might be increased college participation if:

> …outcome-driven student assessment, tied to school accountability, creates a greater 'academic press' in schools, reducing tracking and eliminating a climate of low expectations, and high-stakes testing school accountability serves to raise the achievement levels of all students. (p. 113)

By "academic press," drawing from Shouse (1997), they were referring to a normative focus on success and high standards that develop as schools raise their expectations and assume responsibility for student learning by adopting specific policies and practices. Increasing expectations of teachers and schools, in terms of both classroom practices and

policies, is a vital component of raising academic press (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982). There is also some evidence that increasing academic press will transform the context of students' friendships (Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo, 2005). The argument they made was that students enrolled in rigorous academic courses, by virtue of being surrounded by and working in cooperative groups with other "academically pressed" or motivated students, may create new friendships and develop relationships rich in social capital.

Increasing academic press means increasing the capacity of schools to deliver high-level, rigorous instruction. In an effort to ensure school-level accountability and increase academic press in high schools, some school systems and administrators have implemented radical restructuring programs. One secondary school restructuring model that has received attention both by the federal government and educational researchers is the development of small learning communities or schools-within-schools. According to the U. S. Department of Education website (Smaller learning communities program), approximately 70% of American high school students attended schools enrolling more than 1,000 or more students; nearly 50% of high school students attended schools enrolling more than 1,500 students. They listed on their website what they call an "empirical record" of evidence that suggested that the size of the learning environment has an indirect effect on student learning and that a smaller size creates conditions for success, especially when high expectations and standards exist. Further, they contended that "when the size of the learning environment is reduced, the benefits become apparent very quickly, within a year or two" (USDE, n.d.). Based on empirical evidence referenced on their website, the USDE instituted a discretionary grant fund to large

secondary schools for the creation of Smaller Learning Communities. According to the USDE:

> The purpose of the grants is to provide local educational agencies with funds to plan, implement or expand smaller learning communities in large high schools of 1,000 students or more (the goal is no more than 600 students in a learning community). Strategies may include creating schools within schools, career academies, restructuring the school day, instituting personal adult advocates, developing teacher advisory systems and other innovations designed to create a more personalized high school experience for students and improve student achievement and performance. (USDE, Smaller learning communities program)

Despite the claim that their funding of secondary restructuring programs towards smaller environments was based on empirical research evidence linking school size to student achievement, Ready, Lee, and Welner (2004) argued that "on this issue, reform seems to be somewhat in front of research" (p. 1995). They contended that "not all small-school news is good" (p. 1996), reporting that one of the struggles faced by small schools regarding curriculum and instruction is in the simultaneous attempt to maintain themselves as comprehensive high schools. Smaller schools typically have fewer faculty resources, limiting the amount of specialization that can be offered across content areas for students. Another point the authors made is that distinctions need to be drawn between schools that are small by design and those that are small by default. They argued that the large majority of small schools in America are small by default and exist in rural areas with inadequate resources and declining populations. Under these circumstances, smaller isn't necessarily better. Ready, Lee and Welner advocated for the move towards

smaller learning environments but cautioned that the research base needed to consider the possible negative consequences so that reform could be informed by both the good and the bad.

Related to the research on high expectations and student achievement in its attention to school practices is literature on cultural relevancy in the pedagogy and practice of teachers. In their work, Mohatt and Erickson (1981) identified culturally congruent pedagogy as teachers' use of directives, monitoring, interactional styles, and participation structures in classrooms that are congruent with those found in students' homes. Heath (1983) and Au and Jordan (1981) wrote about culturally sensitive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) and others have used the phrase "culturally relevant teaching" to describe the pedagogy of successful teachers of African American students. According to Howard (2001b):

> …the concept of culturally relevant teaching is an attempt to create a schooling experience that enables students to pursue academic excellence without abandoning their cultural integrity. Thus, the ways of communicating, conceptions of knowledge, methods of learning, and the overall context of the educative process are situated within a framework that is consistent with the students' cultural background. (p. 136)

There is a considerable amount of research literature about culturally relevant curriculum and making content relevant to the lives of diverse groups of children (Banks, 1994; Kohl, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant pedagogy as "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and

attitudes" (pp. 17-18). It is based on three propositions: 1) students must experience academic success, 2) students must develop and/ or maintain cultural competence, and 3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching assumes that, "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (p.106). She argues that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to: develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; demonstrate caring and building learning communities; communicate with ethnically diverse students; and respond to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

There are many studies in the research literature on culturally relevant teaching/ pedagogy in action (Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001a; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In trying to understand in practical terms what this type of pedagogy looks like, there is no formula or guidebook. In her own qualitative research on successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) described her work as a "researcher's nightmare- [there were] no common threads to pull their practice together in order to relate it to others" (p.162). The design of this study also included classroom observations of AP classes. The goal was to look for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. But like Ladson-Billings experience, I found it impossible to discern specific behaviors, practices, and interactions as culturally relevant. After careful analysis of interview data, Ladson-Billings concluded that in order to understand practice she had to look beyond the

teaching strategies that were used and evaluate the philosophical and ideological beliefs that guided that practice:

> …how they thought about themselves as teachers and how they thought about others (their students, the students' parents, and other community members), how they structured social relations within and outside of the classroom, and how they conceived of knowledge. (p.162)

Ladson-Billings argued that successful teachers of African American students demanded, reinforced and produced academic excellence in their students and did so by not just making students feel good about themselves, but by getting students to choose academic excellence. In terms of teacher-student relationships, she found that "teachers kept the relations between themselves and their students fluid and equitable. They encouraged the students to act as teachers, and they, themselves, often functioned as learners in the classroom" (p. 163). This study, informed by the work of Ladson-Billings, explored the influence of cultural relevancy in teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships by developing understandings of the perceptions of AP teachers, Black students and their parents of programs, policies, and practices aimed at addressing the AP gap.

Summary

The four theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter guided the development of the conceptual framework of this study. Inequalities in society have created systems and structures that support advantages for some based on race, class, and gender. These inequalities are reproduced in schools. This study focuses on race and the Black-White AP gap. Black students are under-represented and under-achieving as compared to their White peers. Deficit theories held by teachers contribute to low expectations of Black

children. In response, some Black children resist or choose not to participate in AP courses. For those who do, they can benefit from productive teacher-student relationships that support learning and achievement. Schools that work to address the Black-White AP gap have high expectations for student achievement and create programs, implement policies, and engage in practices to increase participation and achievement of Black students. Doing so does not advantage one group over another but rather promotes equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Given that we live in a democracy that espouses the rights of all humans for equality and justice, working towards eliminating the achievement gap is necessary and vital. Whether the call is for reform of socioeconomic systems, teacher education, or school organization, we have an ethical responsibility to take action. Based on the existing literature, schools interested in addressing the Black-White AP gap should be working in deliberate ways to create collaborative school cultures aimed at supporting and encouraging students, particularly Black students, to take AP courses. School personnel, working collaboratively with one another and with parents, should be engaged in activities that demonstrate high expectations of Black students' potential for academic success in these rigorous courses. Additionally, productive AP teacher-Black student and AP teacher-Black parent relationships should exist. The methodology, including data collection, for this study was guided by the research literature and is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

In order to explore how two high schools were attempting to address the AP gap this study used a qualitative, comparative case study approach. Case study methodology allows for the investigation of contemporary phenomena within "real-life" contexts; supporting the exploration of questions of "what" and "how" processes occur within specific contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Collecting qualitative data like observations and interviews provided me the opportunity to investigate context specific phenomena at each school and develop deep understandings of the processes each engaged in to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP. Each case study was constructed from a variety of data sources: interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and students, observations of classes, planning meetings, and assemblies; and official school documents and artifacts. Data collection spanned one school semester: February 2007 through June 2007. Comparative case study methodology allowed me to explore particular themes that emerged from the data for consistency between sites.

Why Case Study Methodology?

Answering the primary research questions did not require use of case study methodology. Identifying the programs, policies, and practices that schools used to address the AP gap could have been accomplished by administering surveys and collecting relevant documents. However, those data would not have answered the critical sub-questions of the study that focus on student and parent perceptions and have been neglected in the related research.

As discussed in the next chapter, school reform typically follows a top-down path. In the JMSD, school-level reforms, particularly in low-performing schools, were prescriptive in nature and designed with little input from teachers, students, and parents. School-level reforms should serve the needs and interests of the constituents and, following traditions of critical race theory, this study was designed to include the voices of those constituents. According to Stake (1997), "The case researcher starts out looking for what is meaningful to researchers but simultaneously tries to discover what is meaningful to the case people" (p. 404). Comparative case study methodology was chosen to bring to the forefront the voices of teachers, Black students, and their parents from two demographically different schools. This methodology allowed me to explore factors at work in each school, as well as to examine similarities and differences across schools. Context matters in school reform efforts, so studying high and low performing schools enabled me to see how school context shaped efforts to close the AP gap. But comparatively investigating constituent perspectives from these two schools revealed similarities regarding issues of race, irrespective of context. During the early phases of data collection and analysis it became clear that issues of race and relationships were central issues for both schools as they attempted to address the AP gap.

Developing better understandings of the AP gap phenomenon and how schools are addressing it required some consideration of how the research and academic community had been framing these issues. As discussed in Chapter two, I identified four theoretical perspectives typically employed for understanding the achievement gap: deficit theories, oppositional and resistance theories, critical and socioeconomic theories, and theories of teacher expectations, cultural relevancy, and care. I considered these

perspectives in creating the conceptual framework that guided data collection and analysis. Given that this study was exploratory and concerned with addressing gaps in the existing literature, I was attentive to themes that emerged from these data. According to Graue and Walsh (1998), "looking from many different angles and in many different ways provides a more complete description of the part of the social world being investigated" (p. 102). Constant comparative analysis within and between the two schools in this study also afforded me opportunities to construct better understandings of the context specific processes at work in each school (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Selection Process

The schools were purposively selected for study. Each school had a stated commitment, as established in their school improvement objective, to increase the participation and academic success of Black students in AP and had employed special programs, procedures, and school policies to meet that objective. Both schools were part of the Jones Mill School District[3], a large, diverse, suburban school district that consisted of 26 high schools serving almost 140,000 students. The district also had a stated commitment to increasing the academic achievement of Black (and Latino) students.

The schools chosen for this study were very different demographically. One school, Jackie Robinson High School, was situated in an upper-middle class section of the district where about 6% of students attending qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Meal (FARM) program, a program which is often used as a proxy measure for low-income family status. It also had a relatively small Black student population (10.6%). The other, South Gate High School, was situated in a less affluent community where the

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[3] Pseudonyms have been used throughout this study to protect the identity of the school district, schools, and all participants.

FARM's rate was 26.9%. This school also had a relatively larger population of Black students (44.4%). Despite reported school district trends of increased Black student participation and achievement in AP courses over the last five years, both schools experienced an AP gap between Black and White students. Each school faced unique challenges based on their different demographic contexts in recruiting and supporting the achievement of their Black students in AP courses. At the same time, both belonged to a well-resourced school district that placed accountability demands on them both. These schools were chosen for this study to explore how demographically different schools in the same school district are addressing the Black-White AP gap.

Participants

The primary source of data in this study was interviews with participants, or key informants, at each school (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993). I distributed informational letters to each describing the research focus and expectations for their participation. Each participant was interviewed once during the course of this study. Since the goal of the study was to develop better understandings of the processes and programs at each school aimed at increasing Black students' participation and success in AP courses, participants were purposively invited at both schools. They included the principal, school counselors, and AP teachers. A variety of other staff were invited to participate from each school based on their involvement in programs and processes aimed at addressing the AP gap. For example, at Robinson one of the programs developed for addressing the gap was the Minority Honors Society. Therefore, the coordinators of that program were invited to participate in this study. At South Gate the principal had appointed a teacher to serve as the AP coordinator. Since the AP coordinator was involved in efforts at the school aimed

at addressing the AP gap, that person was invited as a participant. Although many

participants were purposively invited to participate in this study, participation for

everyone was voluntary. As a result of self-selection, some perspectives are not

represented. For example, no AP English teachers at South Gate and no AP mathematics

teachers at Robinson volunteered to participate (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: List of Study Participants

Participants	Jackie Robinson HS	South Gate HS
Principal	1	1
Assistant Principal	1	N/A
School Counselor	1	2
Staff Development Teacher	1	N/A
AP Coordinator	N/A	1
AP Teachers	7- two were also coordinators of MHS Social Studies: 4 English: 2 Mathematics: 0 Science: 1 Art: 0	6 Social Studies: 2 English: 0 Mathematics: 1 Science: 2 Art: 1
Black AP students	14	11
Parents of students	14	11
TOTAL #	39	32

Another goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black students and

their parents of school programs and processes for addressing the AP gap. Advanced

Placement teachers who volunteered to participate in this study distributed informational

letters to all of their AP students. The letters described the focus of the study and

expectations for participation, for both students and parents. Students were instructed to

show the letters to their parents. In addition to being voluntary, student participation also

required parent permission.

Although this study focused on Black students' and their parents' perceptions of school efforts to address the AP gap, all students, regardless of race, were invited to participate. This was in compliance with the Jones Mill School District's policies governing research in their schools. The rationale according to their research office was that it would be stigmatizing to "target" a particular group of students, based on race, for participation. Despite the potential for confusion among students who were not Black, being asked if they would like to participate in a study that focused on Black student participation and achievement in AP courses, the selection process occurred relatively smoothly. In anticipation of the obvious question from non-Black students in each class, "Why did you give this to me?" I collaborated with AP teacher participants to determine how they should respond. Most chose to simply respond by saying, "I don't know, but there is a number on the sheet you can call to ask questions." One AP social studies teacher at Robinson considered the raising of that question a teachable moment in her world history classroom and decided to use it as an opportunity to engage her students in a discussion of race as a social construction. Most students, Black and otherwise, likely lost the letters or threw them away. Between both schools hundreds of letters were distributed. In the end, 25 Black AP students and their parents volunteered to participate. The Black AP students were in a variety of different grade levels and were taking a number of different AP classes (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3).

Table 3.2: Student Participants at Robinson HS

Gender	Grade	AP classes	# of AP classes taken
Female	10	Government and Politics	1
Female	11	World History	1
Female	11	World History, Psychology	2
Female	11	World History, English Language and Composition	2
Female	12	Biology, Psychology, Calculus AB	3
Female	12	English Language and Composition	1
Female	12	Human Geography, French Literature, Environmental Science, Comparative Government	4
Female	12	English Literature, Calculus AB, Comparative Government, World History, French Literature, Spanish Literature	6
Female	12	English Literature, Calculus AB, Chemistry	3
Male	12	Government and Politics	1
Male	12	English Language and Composition	1
Male	12	European History, Human Geography	2
Male	12	World History, Psychology	2
Male	12	World History, Human Geography	2

Table 3.3: Black AP Student Participants at South Gate HS

Gender	Grade	AP Classes	
Female	10	Government & Politics	1
Female	11	English Language & Composition World History, Physics, Calculus BC Spanish Language	5
Female	11	English Language & Composition, World History	2
Female	11	English Language & Composition World History, Calculus BC	3
Female	12	English Literature, Statistics	2
Female	12	English Literature, Statistics	2
Male	10	Government & Politics	1
Male	10	Government & Politics	1
Male	11	World History	1
Male	12	Chemistry	1
Male	12	Statistics, English Literature	2

Interviews

Each participant was interviewed once during the course of this study (Appendix C: Interview Protocols). Interviews of participants were semi-structured in nature and were typically 45- minutes to an hour in length. Using semi-structured interviews provided me opportunities to probe and expand on participant responses to explore the research questions. Interview protocols included questions that allowed for open-ended responses and flexibility so that important but unexpected dimensions of the phenomenon would not be lost (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Kvale, 1996). All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Although I took some notes during interviews, I relied on the transcripts during data analysis. I transcribed a few of the first interviews conducted but given the amount of time required of the transcription process, I employed the services of a transcription company to assist me. The majority of the interviews were transcribed by a private company that operated under a rigid confidentiality agreement. Upon receiving each transcription I read them along with the original audio tapes to ensure accuracy.

Observations

Among the observations I had initially planned to conduct were classroom observations of AP teachers and students. After observing a few classes early on in the data collection process and attempting to analyze my observation notes, I realized that these were not necessarily useful in developing better understandings of my research questions. The research questions that became the focus of this study were concerned with participant perceptions of school programs and processes for addressing the AP gap; not my own. For this reason, interview data seemed more relevant for exploring these perceptions. Guided by the literature, another thing I was interested in looking for was

evidence of productive teacher-student relationships. Given the breadth of this study; the large number of AP teacher participants and relatively short time frame for data collection, observing each classroom regularly throughout the semester was not possible. At best I may have been able to observe each classroom two or three times. It would have been impossible to draw conclusions about the nature of teacher-student relationships based on these limited observation data. In the process of maintaining the rigor of the study through triangulation of data, I decided that classroom observations would not necessarily be fully convincing evidence for analyzing relationships.

I did, however, attend and observe various activities and meetings throughout the semester at each school related to addressing the AP gap. All observations were non-participatory and non-interventionist (Adler & Adler, 1994). Despite this, I recognized that my presence alone as a researcher may have had some impact on what was taking place. Observations of these activities allowed me to gather data relevant to addressing the research questions about the processes and programs occurring at each school related to addressing the AP gap. These included school sponsored assemblies, program meetings, and teacher professional development seminars. Recognizing that observations are inherently selective processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994), I attempted to capture objectively in rich description what was happening at each activity. I attempted to record as best as possible what occurred at each event, who attended, and what was said by those in attendance. These notes were typically hand written. Shortly after each of these observations I cleaned up my notes and typed them. I maintained a separate reflection journal where I recorded my thoughts on what I observed in relation to the research questions as well as questions that emerged from both observations and interviews.

Documents and Artifacts

Documents and artifacts from each school were also collected for this study. These included materials that were generated by each school, as well as by the school district, for parents and the community at large about special programs offered at the school aimed at addressing the AP gap. I also gathered documents created by each school related to program planning and artifacts relevant to each observation. For example, in a staff development meeting artifacts included the agenda and administrative memos. These documents and artifacts were another source of information and assisted in triangulation during data analyses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework. The main research question asked, "What are schools doing to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP courses?" Exploring what schools were doing to meet these goals required not just identifying the programs, policies and practices employed by each school but an investigation into the perceptions of school personnel, Black students, and their parents. Developing better understandings of these perceptions, particularly those of Black students and their parents was an important aspect of this study because these voices were largely absent in the existing research literature that examined the AP gap. As discussed in Chapter two, what was prevalent in the four theoretical perspectives typically employed was a tendency to blame students for their own under-representation and under-achievement. The following questions guided the analysis:

- What formal and informal programs, policies, or practices, if any, exist in schools to increase the participation and academic success of Black students in AP courses?

- What role, if any, do the administration, school counselors, teachers, students, and parents play in these programs, policies, or practices?

- How do Black students perceive these programs, policies, or practices?

- How do parents of Black students perceive these programs, policies, or practices?

- How do administrators, school counselors and teachers perceive these programs, policies, or practices?

Data collection and analysis were an iterative process, guided by the research questions and the relevant research literature. I was continuously analyzing data throughout the collection process, reviewing interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. I also maintained a reflection journal of my thoughts and comments on how the data related to the research questions. Using inductive processes, my reflection journal was instrumental to me in developing the initial codes during data analysis. Initial codes included "Relationships with Students" and "School Program". In this journal I also recorded themes that became evident from the data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Examples of themes that are discussed in detail in chapters four through six include use of "Color-blind ideologies" by White AP teachers and "Race-consciousness" on the part of Black AP teachers and Black parents.

In all, I conducted more than 70 interviews, dozens of observations, and collected hundreds of pages of documents. I relied on the qualitative software program Atlas.ti to

help manage the multiple sources of data collected. Data were uploaded into various hermeneutic units (HUs) and then coded. Two levels of data organization and analysis were established. Since this study explored the practices and perceptions of various groups across two schools, a HU was created for each group: administrators, school counselors, AP teachers, Black students, and parents. Interviews from each group were uploaded into the corresponding HU. For example, the Parent HU contained interviews of parents from both schools. This allowed me to conduct comparative analyses between schools. The second level of analysis involved construction of each case study, in other words, the story of each school. I did not rely on Atlas.ti during this process and instead maintained two reflection journals. I engaged in cross-case analysis using the software program while simultaneously documenting and considering issues or themes unique to each school in my journals.

During the coding process, each HU was coded separately. My conceptual framework informed the development of the initial codes during the early stages of data analysis. For example, one of the initial codes employed in analysis of the Student HU was "Student perceptions of AP teachers' expectations". In addition to these analysis codes, inductive processes allowed me to look for codes that emerged from the data. An example of this at Jackie Robinson High, where they had a unique program called the Minority Honors Society, was the code "Perceptions of the MHS". Specific codes were developed for each HU and assisted me in developing understandings about each group's perceptions of the issues under investigation, both as part of a case study and across cases.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) coding "typically leads to a reshaping of your perspective and of your instrumentation for the next pass" (p. 65). Atlas.ti was useful for organizing the large volume of data collected during the course of this study and allowed me to code and re-code data at multiple points during the collection process. It assisted me in the process of conducting multiple lines of analysis and inquiry. For example, after coding I could run reports that showed me all data within a HU that had been double-coded. For example, in the Parent HU I could look at data coded "Teacher Expectations" and "Color-Blind Approach". The program also labeled all data pieces so that it was easy to discern the school/ person from which it came.

Rigor

Throughout this qualitative study I maintained high standards of academic rigor. Quantitative and experimental researchers generally attempt to design, in advance, controls that will deal with both anticipated and unanticipated threats to validity. These include control groups, statistical control of extraneous variables, randomized sampling and assignment, the framing of explicit hypotheses in advance of collecting the data, and the use of tests of statistical significance. According to Maxwell (2005), "these prior controls deal with most validity threats in an anonymous, generic fashion" (p. 107). Maxwell argued, however, that "qualitative researchers rarely have the benefit of previously planned comparisons, sampling strategies or statistical manipulations that 'control for' plausible threats, and must try to rule out most validity threats after the research has begun, using evidence collected during the research itself to make these 'alternative hypotheses' implausible" (p. 107). He suggested that addressing particular validity threats after a tentative account has been developed, rather than by attempting to

eliminate such threats through prior features of the research design is, in fact, more fundamental to the scientific method than is the latter approach. Furthermore, he suggested that qualitative researchers generally deal with validity threats as particular events or processes that could lead to invalid conclusions rather than as generic variables that need to be controlled. For this study, I addressed two broad types of validity threats; researcher bias and reactivity.

Researcher Bias

My personal experiences as a classroom teacher of an AP course and subsequent concerns about the factors associated with Black students' under-representation and academic success in AP courses had the potential to lead to great subjectivity in this research project. According to Maxwell (2005), "validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity" (p. 108). My subjectivities have actually fueled my interests in investigating this phenomenon and informed the ways in which I have thought about what it means to support Black students in rigorous high school course work like AP. While my experiences as a classroom teacher have led to the development of craft knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation, as a researcher I never presumed to know the answers to the research questions in advance of analyzing the data collected.

This study was well informed by the research literature. My craft knowledge and understandings gleaned from the literature helped me to think about what to look for and look at but did not narrow this investigation. One reason I employed a relatively loose research design was the desire to cast a wide net during data collection to explore the phenomenon. For example, my initial conceptual framework (Appendix B), drawing on

the literature, included a variety of factors that influenced Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. In light of the research findings, I re-examined my conceptual framework and redesigned it to represent what was occurring at each of the two schools (Appendix C & D). What becomes apparent and is discussed in more detail in Chapter four is the influence of school district accountability contexts on school-level reform efforts. Casting a wide net during data collection and analysis provided me the opportunity to capture this relationship, and others, that a narrower design may have concealed.

Reactivity

Eliminating the effect of the researcher on a setting or individuals in a qualitative study is virtually impossible. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate it but rather to understand it and use it productively. My positionality as a classroom teacher in the district I was researching had the potential to influence the information I received from the participants. There was always a possibility throughout this study that teachers would not be willing to be observed and would say what they thought I wanted to hear. Additionally, given that each school in this study was under intense pressure from the school district to raise the academic achievement of their Black students, it was also likely that my presence could have been viewed politically by administrators and other school personnel.

I maintained the integrity of the data collection and research findings by being honest about my intentions with all participants. In the early stages of data collection I explained to participants my interest in exploring what schools are doing to recruit and support the academic achievement of Black students in AP. The two schools chosen for

this study had stated explicitly their commitment to these objectives. As a researcher interested in these questions, I carefully explained to participants that in addition to informing the school's practices, studying what they were doing to meet these objectives could help other schools and school districts better understand how they could work towards these goals. Participants also knew that they, the school district, and both schools would be assigned pseudonyms and only referred to by these pseudonyms to protect their identities. They also knew the purpose was not evaluation, but understanding: understand better efforts to close the AP gap.

Summary

If honors and AP courses in high schools are important for students interested in higher education opportunities, then developing better understandings of what schools can do to recruit and support the academic achievement of underrepresented students is critical to ensuring equity in educational outcomes. The Jones Mill School District (JMSD) is one school system committed to addressing this issue in its high schools through a variety of new programs and restructuring reform efforts. Despite documented gains in the last five years, the district is still struggling to close the AP gap between Black and White students. The purpose of the two case studies I conducted of demographically different schools in the JMSD was to develop understandings of what each is doing to address this problem.

In the next chapter I describe in more detail characteristics of the Jones Mill School District and the two schools I investigated. I also analyze the influence of school district accountability pressures on each school. Understanding the broader policy context within which school personnel at Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High

School attempted to address the AP gap is important for developing better understandings of the processes employed at each school.

Chapter 4: One School District, Two Schools

The two high schools in this study are part of the Jones Mill School District (JMSD) and are subject to the same accountability pressures from the top. Although the school district is committed to increasing student achievement in its high schools, that imperative is articulated differently to each school based on their unique demographic contexts and student achievement data. At the minimum, all students are expected to pass standardized state assessments and graduate from high school. Expectations for high achievement are articulated in imperatives for schools to increase participation and achievement in rigorous, college preparatory course work. These expectations differ for Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School and are mediated by their demographic contexts and student achievement data. These differing expectations influence the relationships between school administrators and the school district as well as the implementation of school level reforms for addressing the AP gap.

This chapter begins with a description of the accountability pressures the JMSD imposes on high schools in its jurisdiction. The following two sections explore the nature of relationships between each school's principal and the school district and how those relationships influence reforms at each their respective schools for addressing the AP gap.

Accountability Pressures in the JMSD

As one of the largest, best-funded, and most diverse school districts in the region, the JMSD is constantly in the local and national media spotlight and not immune to increased accountability pressures created by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB essentially reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA), which was originally enacted in 1965. The guiding ideas behind NCLB are that schools and districts work best when they have greater control and flexibility over how they use federal education funds, when scientifically-proven effective teaching methods are employed, and when schools are held accountable for demonstrating that students are achieving via standardized tests. One of the most important changes under NCLB is this last principle: accountability. NCLB calls for increased accountability for states in terms of demonstrating that they are supporting the achievement of ALL students. A major provision is that states disaggregate student achievement data they report according to race and socioeconomic status. This provision has made transparent the persistence of achievement gaps between Blacks and Latinos and their White and Asian peers. As a result, many states and school districts are focusing reform efforts on addressing these gaps.

While these pressures have influenced a variety of reforms, policies and programs in high schools in the JMSD, the district's Board of Education had already established academic priorities in their strategic plan of 1999 that aligned with those of NCLB. Among these is a focus on increasing the enrollment and performance of all students in gifted, honors, Advanced Placement, and other advanced programs. Under the ESEA, attention to student participation and achievement in the AP program was located in the Higher Education Amendments as the Access to High Standards Act. Under NCLB it became part of Title I- Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. The goal was to allow the program to be better integrated with other efforts to raise standards and increase academic achievement at the secondary level.

The JMSD has articulated an explicit commitment in their strategic plan to increase participation and support the achievement of Black students in the AP program and they have data to show they have been making great strides over the last five years. Compared with the Class of 2002, there were statistically significant improvements in AP exam participation and performance for all graduates in the Class of 2006. The success of the JMSD 2006 graduates propelled the state to the number two ranking in the nation in the College Board's annual report. More than one-third of the state's successful AP exam takers come from the JMSD. In terms of participation on AP exams, the JMSD Class of 2006 far outdistanced the national and state averages as well. Fifty-six percent of graduates took at least one AP exam as compared with the state average of 34% and the national average of 24%. In a JMSD newsletter released in February of 2007 the district reported that the performance of Black graduating seniors exceeded the national average for all students. AP exam participation rates in the JMSD also reached historic highs for Asian (74.5%), White (64.8%), and Latino (41.5%) graduates.

However, the participation rates for Black graduates declined (from 29.2% to 27.4%). In terms of performance on AP exams, Black students also achieved at much lower rates than other groups. In 2006, only 15.8% of Black students earned a score of 3 or higher on one or more AP exams as compared to 58.7% for Asian students, 54.8% for White students, and 32.7% for Latino students. The statistics are even more discouraging when comparing the percentages of students scoring at high levels (4 or 5). Only 9.2% of Black students earned a 4 or higher on one or more AP exams in 2006 as compared to 46% for Asian students, 41.5% for White students, and 25.1% for Latino students.

Despite gains that Black students have made since 2002, this group still seems to be left behind when compared to their peers in participation in AP classes and achievement on AP exams. The AP gap persists between Black students and all other students in the JMSD. This has not gone without scrutiny from the local media and the superintendent's office. As a result, the school district has increased pressure on high school administrators to narrow not only this gap but other gaps that persist between Black students and their White and Asian peers, particularly with regards to performance on required state assessments and graduation rates. Those pressures are experienced by school administrators in different ways depending on their demographic and social contexts.

Jackie Robinson High School: "Don't Let the Smooth Taste Fool You"

Jackie Robinson High School is located in an affluent section of the Jones Mill School District. Single family homes in the Robinson zip code average between $1.2 and $1.5 million. Teachers at Robinson say they typically do not patronize the gas station near the school because prices there are usually as much as 25% higher than those in other parts of the district. Students who attend the school, except for those international students new to the area, typically have known each other since middle school since all students from the same middle schools attend Robinson. The student population at Robinson is fairly homogenous and less racially and socioeconomically diverse than the school district averages (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Demographic Data of Students at Robinson and in the JMSD

Groups	Robinson	JMSD
Black students	10.3%	22.9%
Latino students	13%	20.7%
White students	62.8%	41.3%
Asian students	13.7%	14.8%
Students receiving FARMs	5.5%	25.8%

Despite the relatively low percentage of Black students enrolled at Robinson, a large percentage of these students are eligible for FARMs (40%). The reported drop-out rate for the previous year was 1%, the suspension rate was 4.3% and the percentage of students meeting the state university system entrance requirements was over 80%. The graduation rate for 2007 was 96.5%, well above the district average of 91.4%. The professional staff is largely White and does not mirror the student diversity (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Demographics of Professional Staff & Students at Robinson

Racial Groups	Teachers at Robinson	Students at Robinson
Black	7%	10.3%
Latino	2.8%	13%
White	84.6%	62.8%
Asian	5.6%	13.7%

At the time of this study, out of 509 classes offered to students, 85.7% were taught by "high quality teachers" as defined in the ESEA. This is higher than the district average of about 80%. To be classified as "high quality", teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree from a regionally-accredited institution of higher education and a valid Standard Professional Certificate, Advanced Professional Certificate, or Resident Teacher Certificate in the subject area they are teaching. With regards to their state assessment

performance, students at Robinson passed required exams at rates close to, if not exceeding, school district averages[4] (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Student Performance on State Assessment in the JMSD & at Robinson

State Assessments	JMSD Pass Rate	Robinson Pass Rate
English 10	84%	80.9%
Biology	90%	86.1%
Algebra I	87%	63%
Civics	92%	92.1%

Robinson has also won national recognition for its outstanding performance and student achievement. It has been named a National Blue Ribbon School, an award which recognizes schools for their commitment to excellence and equity. Students are also consistently recognized for their high achievement on standardized tests like SAT and AP and the school promotes this image of achievement through its innovative and nationally award winning website. On that website, visitors can see school achievement data, lists of students who have won awards, scholarships, and other honors as well as access information about the school history, programs it offers and upcoming news and events. These data draw a picture of a school where students are likely to be taught by high quality teachers, to stay in high school for four years, graduate and go on to college.

Accountability Pressures

Robinson experiences little pressure from the JMSD to meet strategic performance goals and for obvious reasons. On the surface the school seems to be performing relatively well as compared to many other schools in the district. But underneath its seemingly well functioning and high performing image the school is struggling to create equity for its Black students in AP participation.

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[4] The passing rate at Robinson High in Algebra I was significantly lower than the school district average. This represents a district-wide phenomenon experienced by a number of the high schools in this subject.

When I met with Dr. Christian Ragan, the principal of Robinson High School, to explain my study his first comment to me was, "I know what you're thinking, but don't let the smooth taste fool you." He was referring to the fact that despite the promising picture the before-mentioned data drew of students at Robinson, the school is failing Black students in supporting their participation and achievement in AP classes. During the 2006-2007 school year, Robinson offered 31 AP courses. Of the more than 1200 seats in these classes, only 65 were occupied by 37 Black students. At a school where about 200 Black students were enrolled, this translates to a little over 18% of all Black students in at least one AP class. This is much lower than for other groups at the school (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Percentage of Students Taking at Least One AP Class at Robinson

Racial Group	% of Students in Group Taking at least one AP class
Black	18%
White	60%
Latino	35%
Asian	49%

The disparity in AP participation between Black students and other racial groups at Robinson is of concern to Dr. Ragan. During one interview he shared a story about a college admissions officer from a historically black college who visited him and had a scholarship to offer to a Black male student:

I was so disgusted. Here I had the admissions regent from one of the most prestigious black colleges in our country giving me money and I couldn't take it. He said give me one of your brightest Black males and we will give him a full ride and I didn't have one who was eligible to even be accepted to the school. I mean, we only have about 200 Black students, maybe half of them are male, and

not one was eligible for college admission. It was at that point I realized how terribly we had failed our students and that we needed to do something immediately to begin addressing the disparities for this small group of children in our school. I mean, how sad is that? You mean we can't support a small group of 200 students? That is ridiculous! (4-4-07)

Despite the relatively high achievement among students at Robinson, Dr. Ragan was expected to include in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) how he planned to increase achievement and rigor among Black students. However, Dr. Ragan was not forced to implement any ready-made programs prescribed by the JMSD. Dr. Ragan was afforded the opportunity to develop programs that he felt would best serve the needs of his students. To this end, he shared two initiatives he was supporting at Robinson: a student organization or program called the Minority Honors Society and a rigorous year long staff development agenda focused on diversity awareness and equity issues in education.

Minority Honors Society

The principal at Robinson took his position in the fall of 2004. He first joined the team at Robinson as acting principal and was instructed by the superintendent's office to "keep the ship afloat" until he was formally made principal. Robinson had an excellent reputation and the objective, as articulated to him, was to maintain that reputation. He defined that "reputation" as a "culture based on academic and athletic achievement." Despite that, he was concerned about the disparities that he saw between Black students and their counterparts at the school in terms of participation in college rigorous course work:

When I came here, my concern was that I wanted to make sure that that culture,

that reputation, was available to everyone. And I wasn't convinced, looking at the

data, that it was…within probably a month of being here, I had already started

talking about this idea--about the [Minority Honors Society]--with a few select

people, an assistant principal who was here at the time, and some teachers.

(4-4-07)

He called together a special interest group made up of assistant principals, classroom

teachers, school counselors, and Black and Latino students in AP classes to talk about the

issues that contributed to the school's AP gap and to find solutions. It was from this

work group that the idea for the Minority Honors Society (MHS) was born. The goal of

the program was to create an organization for Black and Latino students that not only

recognized their academic achievement, but encouraged and supported them in rigorous,

college preparatory course work like AP.

The program began in 2005 with a group of about 200 students, of which about 75

were Black. These students, mainly juniors and seniors, were invited to join as "founding

members" and to work closely with two coordinators to structure a variety of

opportunities that would not only encourage other minority students in the school to take

AP classes but also support their peers who already were. Some of the activities

sponsored by the MHS included peer tutoring sessions, outreach tutoring and mentoring

programs in the feeder middle schools, motivational speakers, and field trips to colleges

and universities, particularly historically black institutions. The coordinators, Abigail

East and Will Michaels, were both social studies teachers at the school and the only

Black AP teachers at the school. During the first year (2006-2006) they were teaching

their full-time load of five courses each semester and coordinating the program without additional compensation. By the second year, Dr. Ragan was able to obtain extra staffing allocations from the district to support their positions as coordinators. This provided them with an extra release period for their work with the MHS. That year (the year this study was conducted) membership numbers had remained fairly consistent but the program had grown to include freshman and sophomores.

Another main component of the MHS involved faculty mentors. Teachers were asked to volunteer to serve as mentors to two or three MHS students each year. Under the plan, teachers would essentially take a few students in the program "under their wing," meeting with them regularly and checking on their academic progress and emotional well-being. The idea was to pair students with an adult in the building who could be a mentor as well as an advocate for them. Each year since its inception the program has consistently had the support of between 15-20 teachers who serve as mentors to MHS students. Despite this, coordinator Ms. East, talked about the difficulty getting real buy-in from the entire staff with regards to the purposes and objectives of the MHS:

It's hard to feel like you're trying to do a program where there are some who are just completely not in support. There are some who, I think, are trying to still figure out what they think. And I think there are some that are against it. Are they going to say flat-out, "We don't support this"? No… You know, things like teachers saying, "I don't really feel like I can participate in this," this overall kind of sense of, "I'm having a problem with a black student. Let me go tell [Will] and [Abigail], and they'll do something about it," just a lack of ownership, a lack of real--that these [MHS] kids are not [Will] and [Abigail's] kids; they're

everybody's kids. They're all of our kids. We all are teachers to make sure that

every kid succeeds whether they have every tool that a kid could need to be

successful, whether they have none, that we're all here to make sure that all kids

succeed. And I think our teachers at [Robinson] want to be a part of helping all

kids succeed, but I think whether they feel like they don't know how to relate to

some of these kids or whether they really feel like they don't want to deal with

their own misconceptions and stereotypes or their own preconceived ideas about

these kids…(3-23-07)

Ms. East firmly believed that until there was some real change in the attitudes among the

predominantly White teachers at Robinson, there would be little the MHS program could

offer or do to support Black students in rigorous academic course work like AP. This was

particularly pertinent given that many of these resistant teachers were teaching AP classes

at the school.

Staff Development Agenda

The other initiative Dr. Ragan pursued to address disparities in AP participation

was staff development. Dr. Ragan was keenly aware of the important connection that

existed between student participation in these classes and the attitudes of teachers,

particularly AP teachers, towards students of color:

If you're going to be tackling issues of minority achievement, then we've also got

to be able to address the baggage that we all bring to our school, to our

classrooms. And everyone's carrying baggage. Teachers are carrying baggage.

The students are carrying baggage. We all bring baggage. The question is: How

can we check some of this? First of all, how can we understand the baggage that

we're carrying and then how can we check some of it at the door so it's not

interfering with our work with kids? We all have prejudices. We all have

stereotypes that we fall back to at times, and so it's being able to try to confront

some of that. (4-4-07)

The JMSD has a Diversity Training Office whose mission is "to build capacity of the

[JMSD] instructional leaders to close the achievement gap by race and ethnicity." The

staff development coordinator Emily Verdana, who was also a member of the interest

group that developed the MHS, employed resources from that office in designing a staff

development agenda that would promote the goals for Black student achievement at

Robinson. During the school year the staff participated in what they called embedded

staff development activities. These activities were held during the school day and

teachers were expected to sign up to attend one each month during one of their release

periods. Each session was designed to center on teacher diversity training in support of

the school's goal to increase the participation and support the academic achievement of

minority students at Robinson. Despite this goal, the effectiveness was debatable.

When I talked with Ms. Verdana about her work as a staff development teacher at

Robinson, especially for this school year with the diversity focus, she seemed concerned

about her effectiveness:

So I always say that I have two bosses. One is the [school district] and one is the

principal. I've spent most of my time working with the equity issues in different

ways in [the JMSD] as a staff development teacher for the last six years and as I

see it my job is to improve student achievement by helping teachers improve what

they do. And what they do, or at least what they need to be doing, is develop

healthy relationships with kids. It doesn't matter how much they know or how

well they teach, kids are not going to listen to them or pay attention if they don't

think the teacher likes them or respects them. And at [South Gate] our big

problem is really rooted in demographics. We might not have as many students of

color as other schools in the [district] but we definitely have many more than we

did seven years ago. But the teachers are still mostly White. And they simply do

not know how to or even want to develop relationships with these kids. It doesn't

matter what I say or do in our staff development sessions, they leave like 'Okay,

glad I got that over with,' and go back to business as usual. And that business is

not changing what our data says for our students of color. (4-20-07)

In interviews with other teachers at Robinson, similar sentiments were conveyed. When I

asked a White AP English teacher, Mr. Gorman, about his impression of the diversity

activities during the staff development sessions he talked about the cynicism he felt

towards them:

There are people who, like myself, essentially kind of play the game. We

contribute. We speak up. But at the same time--and this is not to indicate in any

way--I feel like I need to cover myself here. I think that I care about

differentiating. I think I care about knowing about my students' needs. But the

staff development can feel, at times, like we're being told--you know, it's kind of

a one-note symphony over and over again. If you know cultural differences, you

will be better able to teach. And you start to feel like, "Well, I've heard that a

dozen times, and I think I'm aware of that." At the same time, my job everyday,

day in, day out, is to teach. And I don't always, sitting down to prepare a lesson,

think about, "Now how can I vary my learning styles for--" Let's be honest. Let's

be realistic. Most teachers don't think through that. (4-18-07)

Mr. Gorman, believing himself to be a caring teacher and in-tune with his students'

needs, feels like the staff development activities on diversity are a waste of his time. He

also suggests that some of colleagues share this perception.

Ms. East also commented on the problems she had with the diversity initiatives at the

school. She felt like they were not explicit enough and that was contributing to not only

the confusion by White teachers about the importance of what they were expected to

participate in each month, but also to the failure of the initiative to ever make any real

changes in teacher attitudes towards students of color:

And I think what's happened too is that there's been a little bit of dancing around

it… So there's been this whole dialogue…We're working on student-teacher

relationships….this whole thing about equity has kind of gotten melted into this

whole thing about relationships…And I think that if you just ask a random staff

member, "What do you think we're doing here?" I don't think that the average

staff member would be able to articulate that this is about equity issues for

students of color in our building. (3-23-07)

Despite the questioned effectiveness of both initiatives (MHS and the staff development

agenda focus on diversity), Dr. Ragan seems to have some latitude with the JMSD in

terms of designing and initiating his own reforms to meet the needs of his students, staff

and school as a whole. Accountability pressures exist for Robinson and Dr. Ragan, but

they are not as dire as for lower performing schools in the district. Students at Robinson

passed standardized assessments and graduated at much higher rates than many other

schools. Despite the gap that existed between Black and White students, more students in general were not only taking AP exams, but performing very well and going to a number of prestigious four year colleges after high school. On paper Robinson High School looked good; their data drew the picture of a school where, in general, students were achieving at relatively high levels.

South Gate High School: "A Hot Mess"

Despite the seemingly short distance between South Gate and Robinson High School, they are worlds apart. South Gate is located in a less affluent community than Robinson and is surrounded by upper middle-class single family homes, where the most highly priced sell for about $500,000, as well as relatively low cost apartment complexes. The school itself is accessible by public bus transportation and sits on a heavily trafficked rush hour route that connects the eastern and western fringes of the district. The school was remodeled in 1999 and the facilities are fairly new and modern. South Gate has higher percentages of Black and Latino students than both Robinson and the school district averages. It also has a higher percentage of students who qualify for the FARMs program than the school district average (see Table 4.5). Despite having a higher percentage of Black students than Robinson, both schools have comparable percentages of low-income Black student populations. At South Gate about 45% of students on FARMS are Black (as compared to 40% at Robinson). The reported drop out rate for the previous year and the suspension rate were also higher than at Robinson. Additionally, the graduation rates and percentage of students meeting the state university system entrance requirements was much lower than at Robinson. That same year the school had the lowest graduation rate for Black males in the district, less than 87%.

Table 4.5: Student Demographic Data at South Gate, Robinson and in the JMSD

Groups	South Gate	Robinson	JMSD
Black students	42.5%	10.3%	22.9%
Latino students	30.8%	13%	20.7%
White students	15.2%	62.8%	41.3%
Asian students	11.3%	13.7%	14.8%
Students receiving FARMs	30.8%	5.5%	25.8%
Reported Drop-out Rate	3%	1%	2.01%
Suspension Rate	9.3%	4.3%	Not reported
Students meeting state university system entrance requirements	55.7%	80.1%	91.4%
Graduation rate	90.4%	96.7%	91.4%

The student mobility rate for the previous year was 21.2% as compared to 9% at Robinson High. One contributing factor to high mobility may be that South Gate is part of a school choice program. As part of the JMSD's strategic plan for student achievement, in keeping with NCLB, the district developed two consortia in their school district. Under the plan, students who attend middle schools within each consortium may choose which high school they want to attend based on the signature programs or academies offered by each. The goal was to create smaller learning communities within large high schools to deliver rigorous programs that are relevant to students' interests, establish more personalized learning environments in which students can develop long-term connections with peers and staff, and provide experiences and opportunities that enable students to focus on postsecondary education and careers. The consortium model may contribute to increased mobility among students at South Gate and other participating schools given that they are not assigned to a high school and may transfer with relative ease to other schools in their consortium. In addition, unlike the experience

for students at Robinson High, students at South Gate may not have attended middle school with their peers.

Similar to Robinson, the professional staff does not mirror the diversity of the student population at South Gate. White teachers are over-represented and, for a school and a school district with such high percentages of Latino students, Latino teachers are grossly under-represented (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Teacher & Student Demographics at South Gate

Racial Groups	Teachers at South Gate	Students at South Gate
Black	34.1%	42.5%
Latino	4.1%	30.8%
White	59.3%	15.2%
Asian	1.6%	11.3%

Like their peers at Robinson, students at South Gate are likely to be taught by White teachers. However, they are less likely to be in classes taught by high quality teachers. At the time of this study, only 68.8% of classes at South Gate were taught by "high quality teachers". This is lower than Robinson (85.7%) the district average of about 80%.

Accountability Pressures

The principal at South Gate, Damon Jackson, was new to the school. Although he had served as an assistant principal in the JMSD for a few years prior to coming to South Gate, he left in 2004 to become the principal in a neighboring school district. After two years away he was recruited back by the JMSD to assume the principalship at South Gate for the 2006-2007 school year. He faced many challenges as both a new principal and a principal of a school considered by the JMSD to be low performing. When I asked him about his school improvement objectives for the school year he talked about the pressure

he was getting from the top, the JMSD, to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals in state assessment test scores and graduation rates. These priorities from the school district became his priorities for the school. The class of 2009, at the time of this study the sophomore class, was the first class in the state required to pass a series of standardized tests in order to graduate from high school. The four exams are taken in students' freshman and sophomore years. These exams are in English (10th grade), Biology, Algebra I, and Civics. The passing rates for the previous school year were below the school district averages and, except for Algebra I, lower than Robinson averages (see Table 4.7). It seemed appropriate that Mr. Jackson's focus would be on increasing these passing rates, especially considering the potential impact these trends would have on the already low graduation rates experienced by students at South Gate.

Table 4.7: Passing Rates on State Assessments- JMSD, South Gate, & Robinson

State Assessments	JMSD Pass Rate	South Gate Pass Rate	Robinson Pass Rate
English 10	84%	61.7%	80.9%
Biology	90%	64.8%	86.1%
Algebra I	87%	67.6%[5]	63%
Civics	92%	74.4%	92.1%

Mr. Jackson had a difficult time responding to my questions regarding Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. He talked to me about the small learning communities that were created at South Gate. He suggested that two of them seemed to support those goals because they required students to take AP classes. He also seemed frustrated with my questions given the imperatives he was facing to "keep [his] head above water":

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[5] Compared to Robinson, South Gate's passing rate on the Algebra I state assessment tests in higher. This may be attributed to special remediation programs in place at the school before Mr. Jackson's arrival as principal in 2006.

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If you're asking me if I think AP is important, of course! Do we need to be

making sure that there is equity in terms of access and success in those classes?

Yes! Not only do I have the district telling me that, I've got the media and people

like Jay Mathews with his index in my face about how poorly we measure against

other schools in the district and in the country. But my thing is each school has to

have its own individual focus in order to achieve. The [district's] objective is that

all students learn and they measure that by multiple factors- not just AP but also

[state] assessments. Well obviously if [students] are passing their assessments it

makes it easier to push the AP agenda. How can I push rigor when [students]

can't even make it past the minimum requirements to graduate? (10-19-06)

The JMSD expects its school administrators to reduce the achievement gap on all levels

but defines achievement in a variety of ways. In general, preparing students for AP exams

is a more rigorous process than preparing them to pass standardized state assessments.

According to Mr. Jackson, it appears as if there are different definitions employed for

different schools depending on how well they are performing. At South Gate, the

imperative for Mr. Jackson centered on meeting the minimum achievement markers as

represented by performance on required state assessments and graduation rates. This is

not to say that he or South Gate were immune to pressures from the school district to

increase student participation and achievement in rigorous, college preparatory courses

like AP, but rather that that imperative was secondary to increasing performance on state

tests. The JMSD was not only more concerned that South Gate was not meeting

minimum achievement levels, or AYP goals, but with the relative under-achievement in

those markers among Black students. Mr. Jackson also shared his frustrations in terms of

instituting change and reform at South Gate as a new principal in a school district that was, as he described, "so prescriptive":

> Like I said before, the [district's] objective is that all students learn. And they've got a bunch of people up in central office designing curriculum and creating programs and then putting them in schools. And that's great but they need to realize that their blueprints for what works might not necessarily work everywhere. It's like having an American architect design a home that will be built in Sri Lanka! What works here might not work there. And that's our problem, my problem here at [South Gate]…it's crazy. I mean I see the big picture and what the problems are but it's not like I can just start problem solving and creating programs from scratch. There was already a lot in place here, granted not well functioning, but here nonetheless. And it's difficult to start making changes when you work in a [district] that is not only breathing down your neck to make AYP but trying to tell you how to do your job. It's obviously not working; they've been doing this stuff before I got here! (10-19-06)

Accountability pressures from the top have contributed to the creation of a variety of programs at South Gate that had been instituted before Mr. Jackson's arrival as principal and without his input. Mr. Jackson was a new principal at a struggling school under intense pressure from his school district to raise achievement, particularly among Black students. However, unlike Dr. Ragan at Robinson, he was not afforded much power in regards to designing and implementing programs to meet his students' needs. Meanwhile, the programs that had been prescribed by the school district seemed geared towards meeting AYP goals measured by state assessments and graduation rates and not

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necessarily on increasing student experiences with academically rigorous curriculum like AP. Mr. Jackson's frustrations were fueled by this situation.

The JMSD measures achievement using a variety of performance goals. One of the five performance goals in the JMSD strategic plan and the most basic or minimum standard is that all students will graduate from high school. Given the approximately 90% graduation rate experienced by the district in 2007 and the lower rate for students at South Gate, Mr. Jackson was under intense pressure and scrutiny to identify and address the obstacles that contribute to these disparities for his students. Accountability pressures from the school district translated into increased interference from the top regarding program development at the school level, particularly in the creation of small learning communities aimed at increasing graduation rates.

Small Learning Communities

As a participating school in one of the JMSD's consortiums, South Gate offers a variety of small learning communities (SLCs) to students. For the first time in the fall of 2003, students in this consortium participated in a high school choice process. The process allows each student to rank their preferred high schools based on a variety of factors. South Gate houses four themed SLCs: International Scholars (IS), the Community Leaders Program (CLP), Technology and Communications, and the Medical Careers Academy. These SLCs focus on the application of school-based learning to higher education and the work-force. In addition to completing the requirements for high school graduation established by the state board of education, students entering South Gate are expected to follow particular pathways set by their academy.

All of the students who participated in this study were either in IS or CLP. These SLCs have a reputation for being academically rigorous. For sophomore Abiye, this was a contributing factor in his decision to attend South Gate:

> The neighborhood I live in, right, all my friends, my whole neighborhood, even the children's parents, they've all recommended to go to [South Gate] and be in [CLP]. My mom talked to other parents, and they said, "Well, if you get into [IS] or [CLP], you'll have a good time there." You have to go to at least one of those two because the other ones, they're okay, but if you want to go to college, [IS] and [CLP] are better. (5-9-07)

There is a perception among students and their parents that IS and CLP are for academically motivated students who are college bound and the other two are for "everyone else". While all four utilize the term "rigorous" to describe their programs of study, only IS and CLP describe the coursework in this way. Both the Technology and Communications and Medical Careers Academy describe their programs as those in which students will participate in a wide variety of rigorous "opportunities" that will prepare them for college and/ or a career. In some ways the SLCs at South Gate seem aligned with the two types of education that Booker T. Washington and WEB Dubois debated about in the early 20th century; classical liberal arts education versus vocational training and preparation for the work-force. Both the IS and CLP pathways focus on student participation in rigorous, college preparatory course work, particularly AP courses. In the 2006-2007 school year, 16 AP courses were offered at South Gate and of the 583 seats in those classes, 198 were occupied by Black students, or about 34%. Most of the Black students in these classes were part of either IS or CLP. Combined, these two

academies accounted for 14% of all Black students attending South Gate. There is less of a focus on student participation in AP courses in the other two SLCs as evidenced by the course requirements for each. In addition, not only are IS and CLP much smaller in size, accounting for only about 20% of the total student population, they have lower percentages of Black students than the Technology and Communications and the Medical Careers SLCs.

The small learning communities at South Gate were attractive to students with a variety of interests. This was one of the main guiding principles in their creation: to engage students in rigorous curriculum relevant to their interests. If they are engaged in education that they believe is worthwhile for their future, they will finish. If they finish, the school district's data look good. The school district instituted and provided funds for high schools like South Gate that were not meeting the district's strategic goals, particularly in high school graduation and college entrance. At South Gate the pressure to increase graduation rates for all groups, but especially Black students, manifested itself in the creation of these SLCs. However, in some ways, it seems as if these SLCs may contribute to the tracking of students, particularly Black students who are over-represented in the career pathways and under-represented in the college preparatory pathways, which includes greater access to and encouragement to take AP classes. Mr. Jackson described the SLCs at South Gate as a "subtle sorting system":

> I mean it's pretty clear to me, and maybe not as obvious to others, but we have a
> subtle sorting system in place here. The [JMSD] wants us to increase graduation
> rates, so we've got two [SLCs] we hope will get students interested enough in
> high school to come and finish. And then we've got students who are motivated

and plan to go to college, so we have the other two for them. And then when you figure that our Black and Latino kids are the ones who are not graduating and attending college after high school—at much lower rates anyway, than the White kids here, well, what you have then is a system that sorts them out. Really, it sorts them into two tracks; one leads to college and the other just gets them graduated from high school. (10-19-06)

The existence of numerous program pathways at South Gate has also created what school personnel describe as "scheduling nightmares". While the school must offer courses to students that meet high school completion requirements established by the state, each SLC also offers courses unique to their program. These courses are also required for students to complete their SLC certification. The result is the existence of "singletons"; courses that are attended by small numbers of students depending on their program affiliation. One example is courses offered through a partnership with a local community college. These are double-period courses taught by college professors which afford students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school. The partnership is meant to extend opportunities for earning college credit already offered by the AP program, and these courses are taken by mostly IS and CLP students as program requirements. The problem, however, is that these classes are attended by small numbers of students and must be worked into the master schedule at the school in a way that does not conflict with other classes students need to graduate. The principal and school counselors talked about how challenging it was to create the master schedule in a way that minimizes scheduling conflicts and maximizes appropriate student placement in courses because of "singletons". AP teachers talked about the struggles they experienced

"catching students up" who were transferred into their classes' weeks into each semester as a result of scheduling problems. According to one AP teacher:

It's like they're trying to cater to too many different student interests here and the schedule becomes a nightmare in the process. I know the point of the SLCs is to tap into student interests and at the same time prepare them for colleges or careers, but it's hard for me to prepare them for the AP exam—which is what I'm expected to do, when I get students transferring in late. And not just first semester. These problems also happen at the beginning of second semester. I mean, I don't see why the [school counseling] department can't get it straight. (3-16-07)

Students talked about how difficult it was to get their schedules sorted out each year. They also expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as negative attitudes from school counselors and teachers during the process. According to Rachel, a senior at South Gate:

I don't think there has been one year my schedule was actually right. Things are always messed up in [the school counseling office] and it takes weeks for them to get everything fixed. And the counselors always wanna get an attitude with you when you go in to change your schedule, like it's my fault! No—maybe if they did their job right on the first place, and last year I missed the first two weeks of AP World History because they messed up my schedule and [the teacher] was like I missed too much and didn't want to let me in. I ended up in the class but she had mad attitude about trying to give me make-up work. (5-11-07)

The scheduling issues at South Gate were also a source of teachers' concern about students who were "incorrectly" placed and were not doing class work and homework at all because they were waiting to be switched out. One AP teacher remarked:

> It's a hot mess around here! Once they get here, I kind of have to try to figure out which ones actually should be in the class and which ones were not placed correctly. And I'll try to get the ones that weren't placed correctly moved to a lower level if I feel like they can't have success in my class. However, most of the time, they're stuck; they stay in AP. And unfortunately don't end up doing well.
>
> (3-16-07)

According to Mr. Jackson, the creation of a variety of programs aimed at meeting the JMSD strategic performance goals "creates a mess in terms of making it all work in the master schedule." He adds, "And in the end, even though it's the students we're supposedly trying to cater to, they're the ones who feel the burn when the system breaks down. The [school district] is making us do too much and we're not doing any one thing right." (10-19-06)

School district pressures on South Gate to increase graduation rates while also increasing the numbers of students who are "college ready" has contributed to the creation of a variety of programs at the school that are challenging to organize and operate smoothly. The SLCs, unlike the MHS program developed at Robinson, did not emerge organically at South Gate. Instead, they were installed in the school by the JMSD with no input from the principal Mr. Jackson. This contributes to, as Mr. Jackson suggests, the inability for South Gate to do "any one thing right". Scheduling issues fuel

frustrations among teachers, staff and students and likely impede the development of productive relationships necessary for addressing the AP gap.

At the same time, the SLCs seem to contribute to the "sorting" of students into two tracks; those who will attend college and those who will simply graduate from high school. Black students at South Gate are over-represented in tracks that focus on high school graduation and are under-represented in the college bound tracks; tracks that include participation in rigorous courses like AP. Given the district imperative to "graduate" this group of students, the SLC program at South Gate is not likely to contribute to increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP classes.

Summary

Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School are very different demographically and socially. The students at Robinson seem to be performing at much higher levels academically than at South Gate. For this reason, school district expectations for performance are higher for Robinson High students than for students at South Gate. As a result, the principals at each school have very different relationships with the school district. There seems to be less interference and more site control afforded Dr. Ragan than Mr. Jackson. This may be a function of their differing years of service in the JMSD, Dr. Ragan having been a school administrator there for a number of years longer than Mr. Jackson.[6] It may also be a function of the perception among school district personnel that lower performing schools require top-down reform and supervision.

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[6] Dr. Ragan is White and Mr. Jackson is Black. I chose not to address the race of administrators in this study. While race proved to be salient in teacher-student relationships at both schools, it was not clear how race influenced relationships each administrator developed with the school district or with staff at their respective schools.

Mr. Jackson has much less control over reform efforts at his school and much more scrutiny from the top to achieve minimum achievement expectations. He seems to be subject to 1) more pressure to achieve the minimum and, 2) prescriptions from the school district for making that happen. Given this situation, he is subject to pressure from the district to focus the school improvement plan and subsequent school level programs on increasing Black student pass rates on state assessments and graduation. This makes it difficult for him to focus deliberately on addressing the AP gap.

Dr. Ragan, however, experiences less scrutiny from the top. Even though the data suggests that the school is performing well, disparities still exist at Robinson between Black students and their White and Asian peers in AP classes. Since the school is performing well above the minimum achievement expectations of the school district, Dr. Ragan is not subject to the same imperatives as Mr. Jackson at South Gate. As a result, he seems to have more freedom and power to develop programs organic to his school; reforms that are context specific, particularly as they concern efforts to increase Black student participation and achievement in AP courses.

Dr. Ragan and Mr. Jackson's differing experiences with accountability pressures from the JMSD manifest themselves in interesting ways in their schools. They influence the relationships that develop at each school between themselves and their staff and among teachers and school counselors. Another issue for both schools is the avoidance of explicit discussions about race and racism as they relate to student achievement. Demographically, the schools may be different, but in many ways they are quite similar. At both schools Black students are under-represented in AP classes. At the same time, AP classes were typically taught by White teachers. The issue of race was in most cases

implicitly brought up by participants in this study. In the next chapter I explore how

accountability pressures from the school district and issues of race influence school-level

relationships. Understanding these relationships is important in developing

understandings about how these two schools are working to address the AP gap.

Chapter 5: School-level Relationships that Influence Black Students' Participation and

Success in AP

In the last chapter I analyzed the influence of accountability pressures from the school district on the two schools in this study. Accountability pressures from the Jones Mill School District on Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School are manifested in different expectations for achievement and different levels of interference in the design and implementation of school-level initiatives. Pressure from the top also influenced school improvement plans (SIP) at both schools. As discussed in the last chapter, both school administrators experienced pressure from the school district to push achievement standards.

Robinson High was a well-performing school on basic markers of achievement: students pass state assessments and graduate at high rates. As a result, the principal, Dr. Ragan, had more autonomy crafting the SIP and experienced less intense accountability pressure from the district. In contrast, students at South Gate High were not meeting minimum standards on these same achievement markers. This contributed to increased accountability pressure on the principal Mr. Jackson. Despite the increased pressure, the expectations were not high and focused on increasing performance on standardized assessments and graduation rates rather than on increasing achievement in more rigorous courses like AP. Increased accountability pressures were also accompanied by more district interference in school level reforms to achieve those goals.

An investigation of what these two schools are doing to increase the participation and support the academic success of Black students in AP requires an exploration of the cultures at each school and the nature of relationships among school personnel. This

chapter explores how accountability pressures from the Jones Mill School District influenced the cultures at Robinson and South Gate High and mediated the relationships that developed at each school between the administrators and their staff and among teachers and school counselors. At Robinson High students achieved at high enough levels to ward off pressure from the administration on school staff. At South Gate lower levels of achievement led to increased pressure on school staff. The different accountability pressures experienced by school staff influenced the relationships that developed among them. The nature of these relationships in turn influenced how each school worked to address the AP gap.

Despite their different experiences with accountability pressure, one major similarity between the schools was the influence of race on school personnel and their perceptions of the issues involved in addressing the AP gap. In the next two sections I explore structures at each school designed to address the AP gap as well as the beliefs and perceptions of school staff about those structures. This exploration reveals the nature of school level relationships, what influences them, and how they may influence efforts to increase participation and support the academic achievement of Black students in AP.

Jackie Robinson High School: "A Rising Tide Floats All"

During our first interview Dr. Ragan talked about the culture at Robinson High. As a high-performing school that had received national recognition for its excellence as measured by SAT and AP scores as well as numbers of students who went on to four year universities, the school had a reputation of being high achieving. This reputation had contributed to a school culture based on achievement. According to Stewart (2007), "school culture focuses on the unwritten beliefs, values, attitudes, and various forms of

interactions among students, teachers, and administrators" (p. 184). Robinson's record of academic achievement has contributed to the perception among teachers, staff, students, and the community in general that the schools' culture is based on achievement.

As discussed in the last chapter, the culture of achievement at Robinson influenced Dr. Ragan's relationships with the school district. Dr. Ragan did not experience the kind of pressures his colleague Mr. Jackson experienced from the Jones Mill School District and seemed to have more freedom to craft and implement Robinson High's SIP. Despite the culture of achievement perceived by most to exist at Robinson High, the administration recognized that this culture was not available to all students. Dr. Ragan's administrative team included four assistant principals, two of whom were Black but all of whom shared his vision for racial equity in rigorous high school course work. Dr. Ragan talked extensively with me about his concerns and his plans to address inequities through two major initiatives at the school: the creation of the Minority Honors Society (MHS) and a year long staff development program on equity. One of the assistant principals, Yolanda McNair, also believed it was important to "level the playing field" for Black students:

> I think that there are some students here--Black and African-American students in particular--who do need the field leveled for them. They do need more supports than their counterparts, like tutoring and other supports, because they are in the minority in this environment. It is really difficult to try to push students into honors and advanced placement courses when they feel that they're not supported while they're there, not only academically, but socially and emotionally…
>
> (4-24-07)

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In interviews, both Dr. Ragan and Ms. McNair mentioned explicitly that one of their main goals was to address the AP gap that existed for Black students. The SIP at Robinson High reflected a shared vision among the administrative team in regard to that goal. While Black teachers also shared this vision for addressing inequities, White teachers at Robinson High seemed confused about the SIP goals and did not understand their role in addressing the AP gap.

White Teachers: A Color Blind Approach?

During the 2006-2007 school year, there were 20 AP teachers at Robinson High and all were invited to participate in this study. Seven agreed to participate. Among them, only two were Black, the only Black AP teachers at the school. Both taught in the social studies department, which had the most diverse faculty in the school; three of these 18 teachers were Black. The other five AP teachers who agreed to participate were White: two from the social studies department, two from the English department, and one from science. Even among non-AP teachers at the school, there were no Black teachers in the math or science departments and only one in the English department. When I talked with the five White AP teachers about the school culture at Robinson, they seemed to share the same perceptions held by the community at large:

> I think we have a really positive atmosphere here for all our students. And
>
> certainly there are exceptions to that, kids who are struggling and we need to try
>
> to keep reaching them. But by and large I think we're doing a pretty good job.
>
> (2-26-07)

For one White AP teacher at Robinson High, it was this reputation that influenced his decision to leave a neighboring school district and seek employment in the Jones Mill

School District and at Robinson High specifically. He equated the culture of achievement with motivation:

> I like to teach motivated students. Now, in some ways, I feel bad saying that because when I was at [my other school], I had a good experience there. And I don't think that it should be that all the better teachers--if I could call myself that—should gravitate towards the better school systems. I think that's unfortunate, but at the same time, I'm human, and I like to teach kids that are college-bound and motivated. (4-18-07)

In our conversations about the school's efforts to increase Black student participation and achievement in AP courses, White teachers did not necessarily see the issue as exclusively a "Black" one. Rather, their understanding of school initiatives for increased AP participation and success centered on all students regardless of race. The "equity" agenda at Robinson High was not understood by White teachers there in terms of race. Rather, it was understood as equity for all students regardless of race. For the AP English teacher quoted above, the objective at Robinson High was to increase numbers across the board:

> There's kind of a school-wide push to get more students into AP classes. Does that directly address minority students in AP? I don't know. I mean, I would expect that if there are more students in AP classes, there will probably be more minority students as well. In our department meetings, when we discuss recommendations for the next year, there's not language use that is specific to race at all. (4-18-07)

One White AP social studies teacher shared that as a department she and her colleagues had intentional conversations twice a year, just before midterm and before spring registration, about students who could be encouraged and had the abilities to do well in more rigorous courses, but that they did not focus exclusively on Black students:

> I know that as a department we always, after the first semester, look at students who we think could move up from on-level. And of course, at the end of the year, then we talk to students who we think could go into AP. So it's not just African-Americans, but it's kind of across the board of any students we think could definitely be successful in an AP class or an honors class. (3-15-07)

Another White AP teacher shared these same sentiments, "The goal is a little broader than just African-American students. I think it's a sort of a rising tide floats all motto" (2-26-07). Although the administrative team had made their intentions explicit to me in interviews and in the SIP that they were interested in addressing inequities for Black student participation and achievement in AP courses, the White teachers' interpretation of the school goals seemed "color-blind". They did not interpret the school goals for "promoting equity" to mean that they were supposed to be working to address racial inequities in AP classes.

The interview protocol for this study included questions for teachers aimed at uncovering their understanding of school programs and/ or initiatives they participated in or were familiar with that addressed the AP gap for Black students. When asked, all teachers immediately talked about the Minority Honors Society (MHS) as an important program at the school for addressing the AP gap. They all were familiar with the program at the school and knew it was created to support minority students in rigorous courses.

One AP social studies teacher talked extensively about the importance of the program, likely a result of working in the same department as the coordinators of the program.

Teachers also talked about the AP gap as something the MHS was solely responsible for addressing. These teachers had few to no Black students in their classes. The AP Physics teacher in this study had one black student. Out of the four sections of AP English taught by the two AP English teachers in this study, there was only one Black student. Among the two White social studies teachers, who taught four sections of AP classes, there were only 10 Black students. Despite the obvious under-representation of Black student participation in their own AP classes, none of these teachers talked about feeling a sense of responsibility or commitment to either working with the MHS as mentors or working in independent ways to increase Black student participation in their AP classes.

When the MHS was first conceived, a critical component of ensuring success for the program was putting together a support team of school staff. Program coordinators Abigail East and Will Michaels, working closely with their administrative team leader Yolanda McNair, attempted to recruit volunteers to serve as mentors for the Black students. The objective of the mentoring component was to ensure that each student in the MHS had at least one adult in the building, preferably an honors or AP teacher, that they could develop a relationship with and receive support from when they were struggling academically, emotionally, or socially. Mr. Michaels talked about the importance of this aspect of the program: "Regardless of what race the teacher is, [students] just need to know that you will advocate for them and you believe in them" (3-2-07).

According to one of the MHS coordinators, Abigail East, one of the obstacles to sustaining the mentoring aspect of MHS was the inconsistent participation among White AP teachers in the building. In interviews with White AP teachers, they were all familiar with the mentoring aspect of the MHS. Three of them talked about participating in the program as mentors when it began. However, at the time of this study, none of them was serving as mentor. When asked why they had stopped participating, one was unsure and the other two said they stopped serving as mentors because the students stopped coming:

> I know last year part of the program was the mentoring program, which I was one of the mentors for that. But this year, I don't think that it was very successful. Students didn't really respond to it, they never came in for meetings. So that part of it kind of fell off. (3-15-07)

> I did that last year….So I'd have like four kids come in during lunch, which is impossible to get them to come in during lunch. And then try to talk about…their grades or "Hey, are you struggling with anything? Why don't you go to some tutoring?" And I think we did that twice and then it just fell apart because kids didn't come and their feedback was this isn't beneficial. (3-12-07)

Coordinator Ms. East had a different perception of what was happening. She believed that their lack of participation in the program was based on the fear that they did not know how to relate to Black students. She also believed that the program's existence had given many White teachers "an out" when it came to taking responsibility for supporting Black students in the building:

There is this overall sense of, 'I'm having a problem with a black student. Let me go tell [Will] and [Abby], and they'll do something about it,' just a lack of ownership, that these [MHS] kids are not [Will] and [Abby's] kids; they're everybody's kids…. And I think our teachers at [Robinson High] want to be a part of helping all kids succeed, but I think they feel like they don't know how to relate to some of these kids or maybe they don't want to deal with their own misconceptions and stereotypes or their own preconceived ideas about them… (3-23-07)

While all of the White teachers talked about the creation of the MHS as one program at Robinson High created to address the AP gap, none referenced the on-going staff development activities as connected to the goal of addressing the AP gap. When prompted to talk about the on-going staff development activities in connection with the AP gap at the school, the White teachers in this study did not make any explicit connections. Prompted to think about this connection, one AP English teacher suggested that perhaps there was an implicit connection:

Lately we've had some people coming from the, I apologize, but I don't know what their office is, something about diversity or something like that. And talked to us about the learning styles of different ethnicities, which has been fascinating to me, kind of like how does a kid's upbringing and the commonalities of an ethnicity, like how they bring up their children; how does that affect the way a kid operates in the classroom? You know, how do they respond to you, what do they think of you, how do they process information; that kind of thing. So does that inevitably lead to okay we should be understanding these minority students more

therefore that will help us make them feel more accepted therefore they will enroll? I think so. I think that's an implicit connection. It hasn't been made explicit to us. You know, 'We're having diversity training in order to enroll more minorities.' But I'm sure that that's got to be a goal. (3-12-07)

In my interviews with Emily Verdana, the staff development teacher who also worked closely with the administrative team, she talked about focusing staff development on issues of diversity and equity. She also discussed having little experience with or understanding of how to do that, relying heavily on resources and services available through the district's diversity training office.

I observed four of these staff development activities during the course of this study. One centered on differentiating instruction based on student abilities. Teachers attended a lecture about what differentiated instruction meant and why it was important. Strategies were then shared by teachers to demonstrate how they were differentiating instruction in various content areas. There was no discussion or mention of race during this session. Another session was led by staff from the districts' diversity training office. The objectives, as stated by the trainers at the beginning of the session, were for teachers to "develop understandings of cultural difference" and "embrace cultural understandings of students in their classrooms". During this session, trainers shared cultural practices with the teachers and encouraged teachers to share their own cultural practices with one another. Then they made connections between students' cultural practices and the way they behaved or acted in schools. One example that resonated with one of the Black teachers in the study, Mr. Michaels, related to African American cultural practices:

She was talking about that there is this traditional African-American culture that exists. And since we're very sociable, very outgoing, we may not raise our hand because at home we--or in the Black churches, we talk things out, and that's how we see it. So you need to understand that if that happens, it's not that the student is being rude. It's part of their cultural background. For me, it's a good message to give across in that you have to understand that certain cultural perceptions or cultural norms are different, and when you think somebody's being rude, to them it's not being rude. (3-2-07)

But there was no focus on or even mention of the words equity or achievement during this session.

In another staff development activity the principal asked Black teachers and staff to share their own experiences with schooling. Ms. East was one of the Black teachers asked to speak. She shared her thoughts with me about what happened and how she thought her comments were received by her White colleagues:

And I think our principal's idea was, as colleagues, sharing some of your personal stories will be very powerful for White teachers to hear in particular and to share with them what it feels like to sometimes be the minority. I'm glad we did it, but it was very emotional for me... And it was very emotional for the other black teachers in my building who were asked to do it because you're being asked to make yourself vulnerable, put yourself out there, share experiences that, at many times, have been painful that you've worked through, that you are still working through, that you still experience as an adult working in a majority-White environment....a lot of people said, "Oh, it was still so valuable." I think it was

still valuable, but I think people were like, "What was that? What was that really emotional, really weird, hard thing that happened there? Wow." It's like we opened up ourselves to share these painful memories and people left with no real understanding of what any of it has to do with their daily work with Black children. It's just out there now and it needs to be connected dead-on. And I don't think they get why we did it. (3-23-07)

It is important to note here that initially eight teachers agreed to participate in this study and one, a mathematics teacher, chose to withdraw after this staff development session.

At the end of the session, after the bell rang and teachers began leaving, this teacher engaged in a conversation with Ms. East, Black AP teacher and MHS coordinator, about comments she had made during the session regarding the definition of equity. Ms. East had talked about the idea that equity did not necessarily mean treating students the same, but rather it meant sometimes giving more support to students who were not operating on the same skill level as others. She suggested that many Black students at Robinson High may need more support than their White and Asian peers and it was the responsibility of teachers, working in equitable ways, to give them what they needed, even if it meant they got more attention than other students in the class.

The math teacher took exception with Ms. East's comments and made that clear to her in a seemingly hostile manner. I was unable to record verbatim what was said in the exchange, but observed one administrator in attendance and Mr. Michaels approach the two in an attempt to calm the situation. The math teacher did not know who I was or that I had observed the exchange. Later that afternoon I received an email from her saying that she was no longer interested in participating in the study. In a follow-up email

I encouraged her to participate, expressing my interest in her perspectives as a math teacher and having received no other volunteers from that department. She responded that she did not feel comfortable given her participation in a "recent staff development activity" and preferred "not to talk about issues of race" anymore. She wished me well in my research endeavors nonetheless.

The last staff development session I attended was the last one for the school year. This session was led by the staff development teacher, Ms. Verdana, and the activity itself was one she borrowed from the district's diversity office. In this session she began by reading a story titled "The Wisdom of the Mountains". The story was about a fictional character Lao-li and his search for enlightenment. She then asked teachers to discuss the wisdom they took from the story in terms of their work in the field of education. As I listened in on the conversations of two small groups on either side of me, neither one was actually talking about the reading. Instead they talked about other issues: weekend plans, a football game that was on the night before, and complaints about all the grading they needed to get done. After about five minutes of small group sharing Ms. Verdana asked teachers to respond, react, or share an opinion and/ or comment to the following prompt:

> What I understand about how having students from a variety of cultures (African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian) impacts achievement in my classroom.

Each person in the group was supposed to take a turn sharing their response and no one was allowed to respond. They were instructed to "just listen". I circulated among the groups taking notes on the various responses. Many of the responses were similar. Many teachers talked about how having students from a variety of cultures allowed students in

their classes to learn from different perspectives and added to cultural awareness in the classroom.

One series of comments resonated with me that day as deficit-based. There were a number of teachers in different groups who felt that having various cultures in the classroom impacted achievement, particularly if that culture did not value education. One teacher said, "I'm so tired of parents who keep blaming teachers when they are the ones not doing their job at home." Another teacher from a different group said, "Some of our students come from families that don't think education is important and don't make them come to school." What was even more interesting occurred during the next part of the activity in which each person was asked to share with the entire group of 22 a response they heard from someone else. During this exercise, not one person shared the deficit-based comments from the small groups. In closing Ms. Verdana directed each group to write suggestions on poster paper for future directions for reaching minority students to close the achievement gap and increase their enrollment in honors and AP classes. None of the suggestions were teacher-centered or focused on what teachers could do. All of them, however, emphasized the importance of "parent involvement" or "educating parents".

When I asked the White teachers about their perceptions of these staff development activities they typically responded that while the intentions might have been good, they were basically a waste of time. One White AP science teacher shared a story about something that happened during the session she attended on cultural differences:

> They were talking about the black students, and they were trying to give us some insight into where they might be coming from, and the view that they have of life

is different. And one of the teachers--and this bothered me a great deal--said, 'Yeah, I had two of them in my class. And I handed them paper, and I told them, you know, a thirteen-year-old could have written this paper. But you can do better than that.' So she said, 'I encouraged them to try again,' after she had insulted the heck out of them. I would never try for a teacher like that. And she kept saying she had encouraged them to try….Well, she just, in my mind, burned them down. So that was after the staff development, and I don't think any insight was gained. (4-24-07)

She believed the staff development activities were a waste of time because they were not having any impact on changing teacher attitudes towards and practices with Black students. AP English teacher Mr. Gorman, who described the activities as a sort of "one-note symphony" also talked about the cynicism he perceived from his colleagues regarding the staff development sessions:

The meetings this year have centered around cultural sensitivity. The underlying theme has basically been the more we understand different cultures, the more we know about them, the more we will be able to motivate students and relate to them and instruct them well…. And there's a real undercurrent of cynicism about that by many teachers. One teacher here, who's known for being a little sardonic, said, "I understand that [Jones Mill] tells me that if I know more about cultures, my students will get higher grades." I mean, he basically cut it down to its--you know, what are we really talking about here, caring about the kids, or the bottom line is we want the grades to go up so we look good. (4-18-07)

For White teachers, the purpose of the staff development activities was to increase their

cultural awareness of minority students. They did not connect these activities to the SIP objective of increasing Black student participation and success in AP classes.

However, Black teachers and staff in this study understood the connections between the staff development activities and the schools' goals for addressing the AP gap. The next section explores the perceptions of Black AP teachers and staff and analyzes the factors that contribute to them.

Black Teachers and Staff: Color Consciousness?

Black teachers and staff in this study perceived messages from the administration differently than their White colleagues. Two of the teachers who participated in this study were Black. They were also the only two black AP teachers at the school and coordinators of the MHS program. The school counselor who participated in this study was also Black. All three seemed to believe that not only was the culture of achievement not as readily available to Black students at Robinson High as to White students, but that the SIP for the year was meant to focus on addressing this disparity. Ms. East was in her fourth year as an AP teacher at Robinson and one of the coordinators of the MHS. She spoke explicitly during our interview about the under representation of Black students in rigorous courses at Robinson High and her understanding of the administrative vision for changing that:

> Our principal has a real vision for dealing with this issue of equity, and what does it mean to really be--to treat kids with equity rather than equality. So what are our teachers' feelings about equity? And what do our teachers know or not know about what it means to treat all kids with equity? And what does it mean for our teachers to really see their kids and to recognize that if you have a student coming

into your room who might be the only black kid in that room or the only Latino kid in that room, what are some things you should be thinking about to make sure that you're treating that kid with equity. (3-23-07)

The "color consciousness" on the part of Black teachers and staff and difference of perception with regards to administrative goals centered on equity are attributed to their racial identities and their personal experiences as once Black students. Ms. East shared her experiences and how they have shaped her understandings of the struggles faced by Black students at Robinson:

> For me, I can really relate to what it feels like to be the only black kid in the AP class. That was me. I could relate to feeling like there was this race issue and I was being put on the spot. I can relate to sitting in English class and reading a novel or--yes, reading a novel like To Kill a Mockingbird and having the teacher say to me, "So what do black people think about this?" You know, I can relate to a lot of the experiences that I know our kids at [Robinson High] are having. (3-23-07)

School counselor Yvonne had just started at Robinson in 2006. She also talked about her experiences in school and how they shaped her understandings of the struggles Black students at the school likely faced:

> I grew up in the [JMSD] and I know what it's like to be a minority in the schools here and let me tell you, it' no cake walk! I just graduated from high school in this district about seven years ago and not much seems to have changed. Even though I'm bi-racial and light skinned at that, the reality for me every day was I was Black. My teachers made that real for me every day. (4-20-07)

Another contributing factor to the different of perceptions between the White AP teachers and the Black teachers and staff in this study is based on the nature of their relationships with Black students. The Black teachers and staff in this study have close and personal relationships with Black students at the school that have afforded them opportunities to hear Black students' perceptions of the culture at Robinson High. Developing understandings of Black students' struggles with their White teachers also informed the way they understood equity issues articulated by the administration. Ms. Simpson shared one story with me about an English teacher who requested to have Black students moved "down" to on-level classes because she did not believe they were capable of doing AP level work:

> The only students that she comes to me about are Black. I didn't want to jump to conclusions at first, so maybe that's why I didn't quite catch on at first. But by the fourth kid, who I knew well, I was like something is going on. Then she came to me with two freshmen, and I was like--she comes off very sweet, very concerned, and then she makes a suggestion they move down to regular on-level classes….So we actually had a meeting set up with her and two of the students. They weren't understanding the book. They felt like she wasn't giving them help. Her answer to their questions was, 'You're in AP; you should know how to do this.' And she said, 'I give everybody the same amount of help.' So the meeting got very intense very quickly. The kids were crying. They felt like she wasn't hearing them. She just kept on repeating the same thing: 'I'm here during lunch. Come to me if you need help. I give everybody the same amount of help. I will let you review the assignments.' But she wasn't hearing them. She wasn't hearing them saying, 'I

don't feel comfortable coming to you. I don't think we have a good relationship. I

don't understand the book because you're not telling it to me on my level, or

you're not helping me understand it on my level'. (4-20-07)

As coordinator of the MHS program at Robinson High, Ms. East was very interested in

tapping into Black students' perceptions of the obstacles they faced, participating and

succeeding in rigorous courses like AP. She and co-coordinator Will Michaels

administered surveys to Black students in the MHS in order to better understand their

perceptions and found that many students felt they were not welcome in AP classes and

were not being supported by their White teachers:

We've done a variety of, I guess, what you would say like anecdotal surveys….

the stories that kids tell about their personal experiences moving through

[Robinson High], moving through the classes, the stories that they tell about their

experiences in AP classes with teachers, feeling like teachers don't see them or

assume certain things about them or ask them, are you in the right class, --just a

whole host of stories where I think kids have talked about feeling on the outside.

And in a sad way, [Will] and I have been hearing these stories for the last two

years and have felt like, is anybody else hearing these stories. (3-23-07)

Knowing first hand the experiences of Black students in AP classes and with White

teachers in general influences the way Black teachers and staff at Robinson High think

about issues of equity based on race.

Yet another contributing factor to the different perceptions between White and

Black teacher participants was that while messages about equity *had* been explicitly

discussed with Black teachers, they had not been made explicit to White teachers. In

attempting to initiate his reform agenda at Robinson High, Dr. Ragan had called together various teachers and other school staff, most of whom were Black, in a series of meetings to discuss and get input on how to address the AP gap at Robinson High. This panel, referred to by school counselor Ms. Simpson as the "Because I'm Black" panel, met throughout the year to discuss action items related to addressing the gap. At one meeting Ms. East and Mr. Michaels invited students from the MHS to share their experiences at Robinson High in AP classes:

> This past Wednesday, [the students] met with the team. And our principal and teachers asked them some very particular questions. I mean, they asked the students how they felt. They wanted their stories, examples, concrete information." And it was interesting because one of our [MHS] student leaders, she left that meeting, and she came to see me, and she said, "You know, [Ms. East], I feel like this has been the most important day of my high school career. I feel like I've done something. I've said it. I got it out." And she felt so empowered, and that was so exciting for me to see all these kids who felt so empowered like their voice mattered, and their voice had significance to the top people in the school...And they took an hour and a half out of their day to really listen to these kids, to buy them lunch, to spend time with them and to view them as experts and to really see them as a concrete piece of data and as students and as individuals and as people that they're supposed to be servicing. (3-23-07)

Hearing these stories from Black students likely contributed to the understandings of those Black teachers and staff in attendance that the administration was interested in equity reforms related to the increasing Black students' achievement. However, the

problem for the White teachers at the school was that this message was not as explicit. Ms. East recognized this problem:

> I think that it's explicit to those of us who are working every day alongside with [Dr. Ragan], this kind of core group of 30 people who are really working, but I do not feel that it's very clear to staff that this is the priority. And I think what's happened too is that there's been a little bit of dancing around it in our school improvement plan, one-half of our school improvement plan is relationships. So there's been this whole dialogue that we're working on relationships. We're working on student-teacher relationships…. So this whole thing about equity has kind of gotten melted into this whole thing about relationships. And although I think that, yes, relationships are key to equity, we are not just talking about this kind of vague idea about relationships. We are talking very specifically about equity issues related to race. And I still think that if you just ask a random staff member, "What do you think we're doing here?" I don't think that the average staff member would be able to articulate what our principal's vision, exactly, is. (3-23-07)

Mr. Michaels also felt that the reason why many of his White colleagues did not seem to get the "race-equity" connection was because it was not being made as explicit to them as it had been for the Black staff:

> They aren't as direct or clear as to what the real issue is because people are afraid of stepping on people's toes. For example, nobody is coming out and saying, look--many students are hearing from teachers when they come on the first day, "What are you doing in this class?" I want everybody to reflect on whether or not this is

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something that you said….I want every body to explore something that you have done that just might have been perceived the wrong way….All right, think about it. Write about it. Explore that. So that forces them to look at themselves as opposed to just talking about, okay, these are some problems that exist in school. Because the initial reaction of almost all teachers is, "Not me. I don't do that. I treat everyone equally. I don't look at color. I'm colorblind. I treat everybody equally." I think that a staff development that forces teachers to look at themselves, things they have done, will really cause more of a dent than just kind of generalizing in talking about things in society because the reaction of most of all of us humans is that it's not us. (3-2-07)

The "they" Mr. Michaels is referring to in the beginning of this quote were the administration and the White staff development teacher Ms. Verdana. In our interview, Dr. Ragan was explicit about his understandings of equity issues as they were related to the AP gap at his school:

Teachers here are very committed….I believe that they want all students to do well. I think sometimes all of us, myself included, think, well, it's that old expression, "If you build it, they will come." You know what? They're not coming. You can build it, but then you have to go out. You have to find them. You have to invite them. You have to give them a second invitation. You have to pull them in. That's equity. Equality would be you build it; you open your door; you say anyone can come in. And then you watch all the kids who usually come in, or used to come in, keep coming in. Equity says you build it, and then you open the doors to everyone. You give the opportunity to everyone, but then you

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go out and find certain students who you know have been traditionally

underrepresented, and you pull them in. You do everything you can to invite them

in, to encourage them, to stick with them. (4-4-07)

But Dr. Ragan also recognized the difficulty in changing White teacher beliefs, attitudes

and preconceptions about Black children. He talked specifically about the response from

his teachers to the staff development session where Black teachers shared their personal

experiences with racism and prejudice in school. He acknowledged that perhaps the

connection to the AP gap was not made explicit enough which may have contributed to

the confusion and resistance he encountered from White teachers. He also talked

extensively about the challenge of encouraging White teachers to be self reflective about

their practice and interactions with students of color; which could not be achieved

through lecturing to them or delivering ultimatums:

It's hard because they ask, 'What do you want me to do?' Well, I really want you

to spend several hours over the next couple of weeks reflecting on who you are

and what you believe in and how that affects what you do with a black student

who walks in your room….But people are still really uncomfortable talking about

things like that. People are still uncomfortable saying Black and Hispanic. I mean

they really are. (4-4-07)

In his efforts to confront the seemingly uncomfortable topic of race with his primarily

White staff Dr. Ragan decided to begin conversations about race with dialogue about

relationships:

I think [the other administrators and myself] kind of felt that was a better way to

go at it than just starting with let's talk about relationships with African American

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students….Let's start with all students. Because I'll be honest, there's some

faculty who do a great job at establishing relationships with everyone, and there

are some faculty who establish better relationships with some than with others.

And then there are some faculty who don't establish relationships with kids and

don't see that as part of their job or responsibility. That's not something they're

looking for….There are some who say, "No, I'm a teacher of English first," or

"I'm a teacher of math first." They're content driven. I don't have a lot of time for

that. I mean your content is really important, but especially at this level, you're a

teacher of students first. We're helping them to develop….We're helping them

become great young people who are going to go on and do incredible things.

(4-4-07)

As pointed out earlier by Ms. East, however well intentioned and conceived, this focus on

developing relationships with students needed to be more explicitly connected to issues

of inequity for White teachers and specifically to the AP gap.

While the culture at Jackie Robinson High School, as perceived by the media, the

public, and many White teachers, was characterized by high achievement, that culture did

not necessarily embrace Black students. The administration's perception of inequities

was based on achievement data and participation in AP courses disaggregated by race.

The perceptions of Black teachers and staff of inequities derived from anecdotal evidence

obtained as a result of their personal interactions with Black students. According to these

participants, Robinson High was a place where Black students typically did not feel

welcome or supported in AP courses taught primarily by White teachers. The lack of

pressure from the school district on Robinson High to address the AP gap afforded the

administration more latitude in designing and implementing their SIP. It also likely

contributed to the lack of urgency or attention on the part of White teachers to critically

reflect on the role they played in sustaining a school culture that marginalizes Black

children from participation and success in the AP classes that they teach. The lack of

accountability pressures likely contributed to the lack of ownership on the part of White

teachers at Robinson High for addressing the AP gap.

South Gate High School: "Water into Wine"

Unlike Robinson, South Gate was not perceived by the community at large to be a

high-performing school. Its performance on achievement markers like standardized tests

and graduation rates was comparatively low and as a result the administration

experienced much more accountability pressure and direct interference in school-level

reforms from the school district than did Robinson. This contributed to the development

of a culture at South Gate based on accountability. As the new principal at South Gate,

Mr. Jackson inherited this "accountability culture" and was interested in transforming

that culture to support the increased achievement of Black students. The difference

between South Gate and Robinson had to do with how "achievement" was defined. While

Dr. Ragan defined "culture of achievement", in part, as increased participation and

support for Black students in AP classes, Mr. Jackson's characterization of a "culture of

achievement" was more focused on meeting the accountability demands of the school

district. These demands did not rank the AP gap as a priority.

The school culture at South Gate was based on accountability: increasing passing

rates on state assessment exams and graduation rates. However, unlike at Robinson, these

accountability demands were based on minimum achievement standards. Demands from

the Jones Mill School District on Mr. Jackson funneled down and were manifest in increased demands and pressure on the teachers and staff at South Gate High. Teachers and staff in this accountability culture were under pressure to demonstrate that they were working to support the achievement of groups of students who are not meeting these minimum standards. Despite this, attention to the AP gap was still important to Mr. Jackson and the accountability pressures for AP teachers were just as intense as they were for teachers of non-honors and non-AP students.

In our initial interview, Mr. Jackson spoke at length about some of the unique challenges he faced meeting the accountability demands of the school district. He admitted that while he was interested in addressing the AP gap, his main concern was meeting AYP goals as established by the state. A larger percentage of students at South Gate were in special education and ESOL programs than at Robinson. At South Gate, 53.6% of all special education students spent more than 60% of instructional time outside of a general education class and 10.2% of students were in the ESOL program, as compared to 39.3% and 5.9% respectively at Robinson. In addition, he talked about an achievement crisis that existed among Black students in general, and specifically among Black and Latino males:

> We look at the groups that are not performing as well as they should
> have…Because our population is 40 percent Black, 30 percent Hispanic, our
> target is Black and Hispanic students…I don't really separate out what we're
> going to do differently with the Black students than we do the Hispanic students.
> The only difference, really, is focusing on some of the language issues. But even
> with some of our Black students they may not be native English speakers because

they come from an African country and speak French or some other dialect. So it's not as though on our school improvement plan we will go ahead and say, "Well, we're targeting that group."…We're looking at our population; we're targeting all of our students. But speaking specifically of the Black students, I call it like a parallel focus. But then we break it out with gender also…and then really getting those Black boys and those Hispanic boys because that is the group--or the two groups--that are not doing well at all. You can look at boys across the board, and then you look at which boys. You're talking specifically about the Black and Hispanic boys. (10-19-06)

Mr. Jackson also seemed frustrated as we talked about the level of control he actually had as principal of what he characterized as a "struggling" school. He talked about the creation of the SIP developed by the Achievement Steering Committee. This committee was made up of several department chair people, the community superintendent, three school performance directors, the school literacy coach, representatives from the district's special education and ESOL offices and, of course, the principal Mr. Jackson. Despite his participation on the committee, Mr. Jackson did not feel as if he was given enough freedom to create and implement the SIP:

It was sort of different for me because since I was new to the building and the other members have a long history both with the district and with the school, I ended up doing more listening than anything else. But in the end I am the principal and was hired because I supposedly know something about what it takes to turn things around. I mean, I made major changes at my last school in terms of increasing Black student achievement! It gets frustrating when so many people

want to guide the process and in some ways it makes me feel more like a manager than an administrator. (10-19-06)

There were three main goals in the SIP. The first two centered on meeting AYP goals and increasing SAT scores. Mr. Jackson saw these two goals as complementary. He believed that supporting student achievement on standardized state assessments would inevitably support their increased performance on the SAT and vice versa. The third goal focused on something called "pupil services" which Mr. Jackson commented on, saying, "It seemed kind of vague to me. It just says we will improve our school culture and professional learning community as measured by an increase of positive responses on parent surveys of school" (10-19-06). When asked how he planned to address this goal Mr. Jackson talked about the creation of "project teams" made up of teachers and other professional staff. Each team would be expected to address specific issues related to student achievement.

Another frustration for Mr. Jackson was what he perceived as a lack of collaboration among administrators, teachers and staff on data collection and analysis for improving student performance at South Gate. When he joined the administrative team there, he had a difficult time tracking down in-house data on student performance. While the school district had some basic disaggregated data regarding state assessment performance, SAT scores, and graduation rates, there were no disaggregated data being collected in-house about AP participation and performance on exams. When asked about those data, he was initially elusive, perhaps embarrassed by the idea that as the principal he did not have direct access to or know who in his building did. Then he acknowledged that this was a problem that carried over from previous administrations and that he was

working to reorganize and centralize data collection at the school:

> Q: So do you track that data in terms of the disaggregated information of who's taking AP classes and exams?
>
> Dr. Jackson: We have it. It hasn't been pulled out like I need it to be.
>
> Q: Who keeps that? Who is actually tracking it in the school?
>
> Dr. Jackson: We're creating that.
>
> Q: You're creating that. Okay.
>
> Dr. Jackson: It's there. No one person was tracking it before, so it's kind of floating around. So what I'm coming up with is not some extravagant process. It's like, 'Okay, if you're an AP coordinator and you're the SAT coordinator; you get the data out.' That way when I need to see the numbers I can just tell that person what I want and they should be the one maintaining those records. [Marcus Patterson] is the AP coordinator this year and [Paula Johnson], the English resource teacher; she's the SAT coordinator. With this new organization it will help us when we need to analyze what's happening and where we're going.

Creating the SAT and AP project teams at South Gate were one mechanism Mr. Jackson put in place to support efforts to meet school improvement goals for the year. While the school's SIP did not specifically address the AP gap, he believed that putting a project team in place to track data regarding student participation and performance in AP classes would support school efforts at improving the school's culture and create a professional development community focused on addressing the AP gap at South Gate.

The other important initiative Mr. Jackson implemented to support student achievement, both in terms of meeting AYP goals and addressing the AP gap, involved a

restructuring of the school day, teachers' time, and increased expectations for teachers' work with students. The school day was restructured to include a single 50-minute lunch period. During twenty-five minutes of that period, designated "Brown Bags", all teachers were expected to work with students providing additional support. The single 50-minute lunch period had been established by the previous administration. Upon assuming the principalship at South Gate Mr. Jackson decided that the staff needed to spend part of that time each day supporting student achievement. He delivered an explicit message to all teachers and staff that he expected them all to not only work with students during this time but also document their work with students.

Mr. Jackson made attendance to Brown Bags mandatory for all ninth graders and held the four SLC coordinators at the school accountable for ensuring students attended regularly. Each coordinator led a project team for their SLC and was expected to track the progress of students in their SLC and maintain detailed reports of what teachers were doing to support students earning grades of D or lower. Teachers in turn were expected to document their work with students during Brown Bags and report to their SLC project team each quarter the amount of time spent with students during Brown Bags, how that time was being used, and any communications with parents and other school staff, particularly school counselors and/ or special education or ESOL specialists in the building. Speaking specifically about the AP project team, Mr. Jackson commented:

> They need to be able to identify what the barriers are that students may have once they're in class--barriers, period. In class, getting into the class, doing well in the class, and performing on the exam. We don't need to have a gatekeeper anymore. We need to have, okay, it's open; you let them in there. We need to counsel them.

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I told them no student should fail an AP class. (10-19-06)

These pressures from Mr. Jackson on his teachers and staff mirrored the pressures he experienced from the JMSD and contributed to the accountability culture at South Gate. The pressures on teachers and staff influenced their attitudes toward and practices for addressing the AP gap. However, these pressures influenced White AP teachers and Black teachers and staff in different ways.

White AP Teachers and an Accountability Culture

Pressures from the administration to demonstrate they were working to increase Black student participation and support their academic achievement in AP classes influenced the way White AP teachers thought about their work at South Gate. One of the main themes that emerged from the data was that teachers felt overwhelmed, stressed, and unsupported by the administration in their efforts to address the AP gap.

In an interview with AP social studies teacher Stacey Strausberg, at the time in her fourth year at South Gate High, I asked her to tell me about initiatives and programs at the school she was familiar with aimed at increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP classes. Ms. Strausberg did not believe there were any and suggested that the emphasis was on preparing students to pass the mandatory state assessments:

> I think school-wide, there really isn't much support from the administration in the
> three years that I've been here for Black students that are taking AP, specifically.
> More of the focus has been on Black students who are in the on-level and the
> lower-level courses, because they're the ones that they fear will not pass the [state
> assessments]. They almost assume that the Blacks that are in the AP are going to

pass this [state assessment] test. Most of the support I get for AP students is

probably just from me, individually, for them. (3-16-07)

Ms. Strausberg talked about not feeling supported by the administration and was

frustrated. Her work was focused on preparing students to take the AP exam in May. At

the same time, she was expected to prepare students to pass a social studies state

assessment test, also administered in May. She commented, "Well, I feel kind of isolated,

and I don't have any support. And I feel like I have to turn water into wine, and it's really

hard" (3-16-07). She also talked about the increased pressure she was experiencing from

the administration to document her work with students:

> They tell us that they want us to do data points….now my project team, AP
>
> project team, we're trying to create a data spreadsheet to show the performance of
>
> groups of students broken down by race and gender. And moving past the
>
> spreadsheet, we were given this binder to keep records of kids who come in at
>
> [Brown Bags], and what we're doing for them and keep a list of all the names and
>
> times and when they come. And it's a lot of extra paperwork on top of all I have
>
> to do to get these students ready for their tests! (3-16-07)

Recognizing there was a district-wide push and emphasis from the administration on

addressing the AP gap at South Gate, she believed the result was detrimental to Black

students and said that it created even more stress for her as an AP teacher. She spoke

about the issue of "placement" and that oftentimes students, particularly Black students,

who perhaps did not have the skills to do well or the desire to be there, were placed in AP

classes. Her concern regarding placement issues was that regardless of whether or not a

student should be in the class or even wanted to be there, she was still going to be held

accountable for students' performance:

> They sat me down with my test scores and said, 'Why are they so low?' And I'm like, 'Well, I was a second-year teacher, and I'm still learning how to be a teacher. And then I was given this AP class and that was a tough year.' And then I said all the stuff that I told you about placement and things like that. When they sit me down and then my fear, I kind of--I'm a little nervous because they're not coming for help. They're not coming for support. Although it's a good idea, the [Brown Bags] thing is not working at all, and none of the teachers really want to do it because they feel like it's a waste of time. I mean we can't force them to get help if they don't want it. But in the end the pressure is on me to get them to do well- it's made to seem as if it's my fault when they don't. (3-16-07)

One AP science teacher, Rick Terrence, believed that the push to increase Black student enrollment in AP classes may have been contributing to the large number of "incorrect placements" of Black students in AP. He suggested that Black students were being placed in AP classes by school counselors to make the data "look good". He also faulted the administration for not allowing students to drop AP courses once the school year began. Mr. Terrence explained to me that this was particularly problematic in AP science courses, like Physics or Chemistry, which had specific mathematics prerequisites. He believed that many of the Black students struggled with the content in his classes because they did not have the strong content background that success in his AP course required:

> There is a big push to get more Black students into AP classes. The first year I taught I had 29 students in AP. And for better or for worse, there were many

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students that signed up for AP that didn't necessarily have the background that they maybe should've had coming in; like they did poorly in Algebra or something like that. But somehow they got signed up for it, probably as a part of the push to increase their representation in AP, and they were in the class. And for better or for worse, the principal said, 'No, you can't get out at this point.' You know, because it was like two weeks into the class and administration did not want numbers to drop. The students decided it was too hard and they wanted out. And he said, 'No, at this point you can't get out.' And so they stayed in and they were all Black students at that point; Black males. And he said, 'No.' You know, they were kind of jaded that they couldn't get out. Most of them ended up failing or barely passing and most did not take the AP exam that year. (3-27-07)

Then AP science teacher also expressed his uneasiness with the increased accountability pressure from the administration to increase students' test scores, describing the experience during an AP project team meeting as "emotional":

It was almost kind of an attack, like okay, your scores are this. What are you going to do about it? And then they ask how are you going to make this better next year. And then many of us retaliated with, "Well, I have way too many students who are under prepared when they come to me and should not be in the class." So it was a little emotional when you are sat around a table and forced to defend your teaching and then, you know, your scores. (3-27-07)

Another AP teacher in the art department also expressed concerns regarding placement issues and the strain it created for her trying to support the achievement of all students:

I'm teaching a foundations class. By teaching the very basics I see what they don't know. I mean, they don't know red plus yellow equals orange. And that's something I know every kindergarten student learned. I don't know if they're just not getting art in the years ahead or where the information's going, because high school students should know their primary colors, things like that, and it's just not there. And I don't know why, I have no clue. They come in to me not knowing a whole bunch of stuff. And a lot of that is because of placement problems that we have. Students are just put into AP classes regardless of if they are ready for the level of work it requires. I'm teaching them a whole bunch of stuff, plus trying to get them to where they're supposed to be, and it's very hard,… they're not even close to being where you need them to be. (3-23-07)

Six AP teachers from South Gate participated in this study and among them five were White. They all believed they were doing their best to support Black students' academic success in AP but that there was little happening structurally at South Gate to support them in their work. By "structurally", most of these teachers were referring to administrative policies that prevented students from dropping AP courses. Teachers believed that there were many students in their AP classes who were not prepared for the rigors of the course and did not have the interest or motivation to be successful in them. They believed those students were hurt by school structures/ policies that prevented them from moving out of AP classes to less rigorous classes; classes where they may have had opportunities for academic success.

They all expressed frustration with the implicit messages they perceived from administration that they were solely responsible for the academic achievement of their

Black students and resented being held accountable. When asked why, in general, they thought Black students were not as high achieving as White AP students, White AP teachers typically attributed lower achievement to student behaviors, suggesting that these students did not want to do the work that AP classes demanded. They also attributed lower achievement by this group to placement issues; that often times these students are not as prepared for the rigors of AP classes and are frequently placed in AP classes by school counselors to "make the numbers look good."

At South Gate, Mr. Jackson instituted new policies and procedures regarding the movement of students out of, or "down from", AP classes. Students could not be moved out of an AP class based on teacher recommendation alone. A parent conference had to be convened with the students' grade-level administrator and the school counselor. Upon review of the student's academic record and other personal and emotional factors, a recommendation could then be made for a different placement. When I asked school counselor Lionel William how often that actually happened he laughed and responded:

> Rarely. Mr. Jackson is of the firm belief that once in the class students need to
> step up their game and make it happen. More importantly, he expects the teachers
> to do whatever it takes to help that child succeed. I've seen many a tear shed, and
> I'm talking about teachers, not students, over that process! (3-23-07)

The process for moving students out of AP classes was, according to Mr. William, "arduous". At the same time, there was a lack of structured academic support offered by the school for struggling AP students.

I asked White AP teachers to tell me about their role in supporting the achievement of their Black students who were struggling or performing at lower levels

than their White and Asian counterparts. They all seemed to get defensive in their tone and spoke about utilizing time during Brown Bags as their primary strategy for providing additional support for their students. But, as Ms. Stausberg mentioned in her interview, the problem was that students typically did not attend. Other White teachers expressed the same frustration with their Black AP students- that they had "open door policies" during lunch every day but the students did not come to them. One AP Physics teacher shared her frustration with what she perceived to be a lack of interest on the part of Black students in their own success:

> During lunch every day, we have [Brown Bags] and, even though on my door it says Wednesdays and Thursdays, I'm here every single day. So they can walk in any day and get extra help. But I can't make them come. I can only be there to help when they do. And they rarely do. (3-13-07)

Another AP social studies teacher expressed the same sentiments:

> We have what's called [Brown Bags] and I always open my classroom up, I mean, every single day. I don't make them come in, I can't. There needs to be initiative on the part of the student. I just think it sends the right message to the rest of the kids that this is not me helping you out; this is you helping yourself out, and I'm just the conduit through which you may help yourself. (3-12-07)

In this climate of increased accountability on teachers to support the academic achievement of Black students in AP classes and to document their work with students, the White AP teachers in this study funneled accountability demands they experienced down on to Black students. They believed they were doing all that they could and typically attributed the issue of Black students' underachievement to school policies and

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procedures and the staff responsible for implementing them. For example, according to Ms. Stausberg, the administration was partially at fault for not allowing students who had been incorrectly placed in her AP class to transfer. Or the school counseling department was to blame for incorrectly placing Black students in AP classes in the first place. Additionally, White AP teachers believed that Black students were not accepting responsibility for their own success. The accountability culture at South Gate was contributing to defensive postures and finger pointing among White AP teachers in conversations about the Black-White AP gap.

It is worth noting that Ms. Strausberg ended up transferring to another school in the district at the end of the school year. She told administration her decision to leave was based on her desire to teach at a school that was closer to her home. She shared the real reason with me; she was "tired of the pressure and being made to feel like it's my fault when I know in my heart it's not". Ironically, the school to which she transferred is demographically similar and relatively closer to Robinson.

Black Teachers and an Accountability Culture

Black and White teachers and staff at South Gate who participated in this study had different perceptions about what was happening, not just culturally at the school with the attention to data collection and accountability, but also with regards to the issues Black students faced in their AP classes taught primarily by White teachers. All 14 AP teachers at South Gate High were invited to participate in this study. But only six elected to participate. The reason most gave for not participating was that they did not have time and were "too overwhelmed" with their teaching responsibilities that year. Those

"responsibilities" included increased demands for accountability as prescribed by the administration and their work on the AP Project Team.

Among the seven teacher participants, two were Black. Kendra Winston was the only Black AP teacher at South Gate and taught AP Statistics and AP Calculus. She had been teaching at South Gate for eight years and was proud of the fact that last year she had the highest number of Black students take the AP exams in both of those subjects than any other school in the district. Marcus Patterson was new to South Gate the year of this study and although not an AP teacher, was hired by Principal Jackson directly to serve as the AP coordinator. Previously he worked in a neighboring urban school district where he coordinated an Honors middle school program. I also interviewed two Black school counselors at South Gate. Lionel Williams was in his second year at the school and an assistant coach for the school's football team. Jason Whitfield was in his eighth year at South Gate and was coordinator of a widely acclaimed program in the JMSD that supports at-risk Black males. My interviews with them illustrated different perceptions of the AP gap.

Ms. Winston believed that accountability pressures and the subsequent "push" in the district to increase Black student participation in AP classes contributed to increased frustrations among the staff in general. She believed one of the issues in addressing the AP gap at South Gate involved the lack of Black representation among the staff:

> I think one of the subtle things at work is that when half of your AP teachers in the building look like you, you're more apt to go ahead and sign up for those courses. I've seen that decline. I am the only one. But when I first started, six of us were Black. And we had very strong personalities. And it's not just race per se,

it's about the relationships we develop with our children, and maybe part of that is

made easier because we are Black. (3-28-07)

Ms. Winston also talked about the significance of relationship building and believed that

her White colleagues were not willing to do anything "extra" to develop those

relationships with their Black students:

I think for Black kids, race helps. I don't think because I'm Black I can relate

better to Black kids. I think it's about the fact that I actually try to get to know my

students. But race helps. To pretend that that doesn't help, to me, is crazy. And I

have people in this building who swear up and down like, "Oh, I see no color," or,

"Being a Black teacher doesn't have an affect on Black students." I get very

worried when people don't realize the impact of these subtle interactions with our

students. It sends messages to our Black students that White teachers don't care

about them. Maybe if you're a White person who grew up with every privilege in

life, you might have to work a little bit harder to get other people, not even just

Black kids, to relate to you. If not the result is kids feeling like, "I don't get you,

and I'm not trying to get your subject either," you know, because they're looking

for any reason why not to get something. (3-28-07)

When I asked Ms. Winston about the various strategies she employed to support

Black students in her AP classes she, like White AP teachers, talked about Brown Bags,

but had a very different perspective. She typically ate her lunch during one of her

planning periods each day because she often had dozens of students in her room during

lunch seeking extra support. When I mentioned to her that other AP teachers said they

had less success with student attendance during Brown Bags, she raised her eyebrows at

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me, sighed, and said, "Well, would you go ask for extra help from a teacher you didn't think cared about you?" (3-28-07)

Ms. Winston also talked about her work with Black students outside of the regular school day. During April and May, just before the AP exams, she organized weekend study sessions with her Black students. Students volunteered to host the sessions at their homes each weekend and she and other students in the class meet there for study sessions that, some days, ran as long as six hours:

> And it's usually on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and we study just like a college cram session. And their parents are usually happy to see us there. You know, it's a bunch of kids in their basement studying. And we do snacks and laugh and games and chalkboards. I mean, it's crazy, but my whole thing is to build a camaraderie, that we are all going to do this together, and I'm going to sacrifice my Saturday and my Sunday, because this is important. (3-28-07)

AP coordinator Marcus Patterson, although new to South Gate the year of this study, also believed in general there was a lack of care and concern among White AP teachers for supporting the achievement of Black students. As AP coordinator, he was given the charge from the principal to direct the AP Project Team at South Gate, consisting of all the AP teachers, and to guide their work in addressing the AP gap. The most challenging obstacle he experienced was getting "teacher buy-in". Mr. Patterson talked about his frustrations and struggles leading a group of teachers who had been at South Gate for many years and were resistant to his leadership. He attributed part of this resistance to the increased accountability demands that, filtering down from the top, he was responsible for delivering to them. At the same time, he recognized the ways in

which race also influenced their interactions with him:

It does boil down to race. I do get favorable and respectful conversations and congeniality from some of my colleagues in the AP staff. However, there are those who for some reason, we just don't click…Mr. [Jackson] wants more accountability and expects them to be documenting their work with students and I have to ensure they are following through….They have not really bought into what Mr. Jackson expects from them and they are definitely not working cooperatively with me. I mean, I feel like every time I have to get data and information from them or engage them in honest conversations about their practice they look at me like, "Why does this little Black man keep bothering me?" Sometimes I feel like Moses trying to manipulate the waters of the Red Sea. (2-27-07)

He also believed that the accountability culture at South Gate contributed to an increased tendency among White teachers to deny ownership of the problems associated with the AP gap. When faced with questions about their own practice and what they were doing, or could be doing, to better support Black student achievement in their classes, according to Mr. Patterson, White AP teachers typically became defensive and resented implications that they were responsible for Black student underachievement:

[White AP teachers do not] want to do anything beyond what they do for the entire group. When I conference with them each quarter about their students grades and their action plan for improvement, they never have anything to recommend in terms of their own practice. A lot of the teachers blame the counseling department for misplacing students in AP when they should be in

honors. So if you listen to the majority of the teachers, that's what their common complaint is. They say the [school counseling] department is misplacing them. And then some teachers say, "Well, I didn't recommend them for AP. How did they get in there?" Some people are saying, "Well, administration and [the school counseling department] just put them in there randomly." So you can imagine what their action plans look like, a whole lot of blaming admin and [school counseling] and suggesting reforms in those departments. (2-27-07)

Mr. Patterson believed that the district wide push to increase Black student participation in AP classes has led the administration and school counseling department at South Gate to take greater initiative, without teacher recommendations, to encourage and place more Black students in AP classes. However, he also believed that the underlying issue at South Gate in addressing the AP gap was that White teachers were not working to build relationships with Black students based on care. Students in turn "check out" and either refuse to register for the courses or perform poorly:

Maybe some of the students are being misplaced. But in the end we're all supposed to be here—I mean this is our job, our profession, right—to support students and especially those who need a little more for whatever reasons. The kids that are in there are overwhelmed and they don't seek out extra help or assistance. Why not? All of these teachers point the finger somewhere else, oh, its [the school counseling department], it's the students, but they never stop and ask and try to understand why their students are not coming to them. They go to Ms. [Winston}! And she teaches probably the most challenging AP class here! They fall back on, 'Well, my door is always open. They can come in anytime.' Yeah,

well so is Satan's door but I'm not trying to walk in there! And I'm not trying to

say the teachers are intentionally evil or anything but, there's no follow through

with the kids. No one-on-one relationship to try to connect with them. No show

that they care.

(2-27-07)

Mr. Patterson and Ms. Winston believed that White AP teachers at South Gate were less

willing to accept personal responsibility for supporting Black students in their AP classes

and more inclined to project problems of under performance somewhere else: on the

students, the administration, or the school counselors.

Black school counselors, Mr. Williams and Mr. Whitfield. were also frustrated

with White AP teachers. Both talked a great deal about the initiatives within the Jones

Mill School District and from the administration to support the increased enrollment of

Black students in more rigorous courses like honors and AP. In determining student

placement they looked at a variety of factors, one of which was teacher

recommendations. Each spring teachers at South Gate enter their recommendations for

student placements for the following school year in a database. Based on, in part, these

recommendations, students are registered for classes. According to Mr. Williams, the

tensions that existed between school counselors and teachers at South Gate regarding

student placement into AP classes emerged partly as a result of the process for registering

students. He suggested that teachers consistently complained about "incorrect"

placements because students they may not have recommended for AP end up in AP

classes.

He explained to me that teacher recommendations, however, are not the only factor used to determine whether or not students would be registered for AP classes. Parents could also advocate for their child to be in an AP class regardless of the teacher recommendation. At the urging of administration to support initiatives to increase Black student enrollment in AP classes, counselors also met with students they believed would benefit from taking an AP class and encouraged them to do so. According to Mr. Williams:

> We try to motivate students, particularly our Black students because they are under represented, to get into the AP courses. We recommend based upon their academic success and then also their testing ability. Then what we do is as counselors is to talk to the students, ask them what their aspirations are, see if AP courses are a part of their particular plan. And if they're not, ask them why not. You know, really try to prod them into it. If a student is achieving As and a few Bs, or Bs, in regular level classes we ask them if they want to take higher level courses such as Honors courses and maybe moving into some of the AP courses….We try to encourage them to be a part of those particular classes.
>
> (3-23-07)

Both men firmly believed that one of their responsibilities as school counselors was to encourage and support Black students' decisions to take rigorous and challenging classes like AP, but they also believed that once students made the decision to be there, teachers had a responsibility to support them academically. When asked about the types of support offered by the school for students who were first-time AP takers or were struggling in AP classes, Mr. Williams talked about Brown Bags, but described them as "unstructured":

Generally, the AP courses provide tutoring during lunch and after-school, but there isn't anything that is like a transitional support for students going from regular courses to maybe AP courses, or even Honors courses to AP courses. We don't have anything in place. The only thing we have is just the regular tutorial with the teachers….Our lunch-and-learn program is involuntary. Most of the teachers have to be available for the students during lunchtime. So it's available. It's just it's not mandated that they (students) have to participate in that. (3-23-07)

Mr. Williams suggested an obstacle in addressing the AP gap was apathy on the part of teachers, particularly White teachers, to the needs of Black students. Despite his relatively short time at South Gate, he talked about the close personal relationships he had developed with students, particularly Black students, both on his case load (which consisted of about 360 students) and on the school's football team. His interactions with Black students afforded him insights into their perceptions of teachers at South Gate and the nature of teacher-student relationships at the school in general. He believed that one factor contributing to the AP gap at the school was what he called "teacher neglect of Black students":

I used to be a teacher before I went into school counseling and I know first hand how difficult it is…But something is wrong when I see teachers treat children differently based on their race. When I host a parent conference with teachers about a White student who is struggling, there is never a recommendation by them to move the child out of the class. They come up with all sorts of plans and contracts to support the student--giving them extra time to get stuff done, scheduling one-on-one appointments during [Brown Bags], even agreeing to

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communicate with parents weekly about the child's progress. But let that be a

Black student! The whole conference is about how the student is not performing,

not doing homework, not coming in for extra help, not trying in general. And they

typically end with teachers encouraging the parents that the child should move

down to a class "more suited to their abilities". Where is the extra-help that the

White student was offered? Where is the caring and compassion shown the White

student and parent during that conference? And the students see the different

treatment. So no matter how much I encourage them to take the class…they know

the reality about what goes on once they get in there…(3-23-07)

Similar sentiments were expressed by school counselor Mr. Whitfield, who also

coordinated a special program at South Gate for at-risk Black males. He talked

extensively about the resistance he had witnessed in his eight years at the school among

White teachers to programs that focused on Black student achievement and success.

Students in his program met weekly during the school day. This required them to miss

one class period each week. While he received a lot of support from Black teachers and

staff in the building for his work with the Black males in his program, he experienced

resistance from White teachers. He believed that the issue was a lack of buy-in from

White teachers for programs meant to specifically support Black children:

Anything that you don't understand or don't value you don't see as important.

And you have White teachers in this school, due to their upbringing, due to their

lack of understanding of other cultures and other situations, who find it easier to

devalue it than to say, "This program is really making a difference in these kids'

lives." I just think that--as in anything else, if you see something as having value,

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you do what needs to be done. When White students have to miss class because of a chorus performance or something like that, [White teachers] don't have a problem and go out of their way to catch the students up on what they missed in class. But when my Black boys miss class for one of our meetings, [White teachers] may not have the same mentality or response. It's the same with the extra support our Black children need in AP. So many of them have never taken rigorous courses like these before and need some support. But the message that gets sent when [White teachers] don't make concerted efforts to help [Black students] is they are not important or valued. (3-16-07)

While White AP teachers were pointing fingers at school counselors for "incorrectly" placing Black students in AP classes, Black teachers and school counselors suggested that the issue was White teachers' inability, perhaps refusal at times, to develop relationships with their Black students, their unwillingness to work in deliberate ways to support Black student achievement, and lack of ownership for Black student success.

The accountability culture at South Gate influenced the development of relationships between school personnel and their work to address the AP gap. One theme that emerged from the data was that increased accountability, particularly on teachers, contributed to their lack of ownership or acceptance of personal responsibility for student achievement. This was further complicated by issues of race. While White AP teachers suggested they were doing everything they could to support their Black students, in the final analysis they believed that it was unfair to expect them to "turn water into wine"; teaching rigorous curriculum to students who were either not academically prepared or

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not motivated to work hard. Meanwhile, Black teachers' and counselors' perceptions of their White colleagues were that they were not accepting responsibility for supporting the achievement of Black students and instead were interested in projecting the problems elsewhere.

Summary

The expectations of school administrators at both Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School were that teachers' work should focus on promoting academic success for all students, but particularly for Black students who were not achieving at levels comparable to their White peers. At both schools, Black students were under-represented in AP classes and among those participating, their achievement was low compared to White students. While one school experienced less pressure from administration regarding accountability for addressing the AP gap than the other, differing pressures did not influence teachers' work in observably different ways.

At Robinson, the lack of accountability pressure allowed the principal more freedom and latitude to design and implement programs organically and with little school district interference. He worked with select staff, primarily Black, to craft initiatives and programs to address the AP gap. The principal and his "Because I'm Black" panel collaborated and implemented two programs to address the AP gap at the school: the Minority Honors Society and a staff development agenda focused on diversity and equity. Both the administration and the Black teachers and staff believed they were responsible for supporting Black student participation and achievement in AP classes.

However, the absence of direct and explicit "pressure" for change from the school district and the prevailing culture of achievement at Robinson High contributed to the

attitudes among White AP teachers in this study that the "rising tide floats all". Furthermore, they believed that programs like MHS and the work of teachers like Ms. East and Mr. Michaels would be enough to address whatever obstacles existed for Black students' achievement in their school. The absence of accountability pressures contributed to a lack of ownership on the part of White AP teachers for the academic success of Black students in AP classes.

In a different setting, where the culture was based on accountability, ironically a similar phenomenon exists. At South Gate, accountability pressures on teachers and what they perceived as constant scrutiny by the administration to demonstrate they were working to address the AP gap, contributed to their lack of ownership for supporting Black students' achievement in AP classes. White AP teachers at South Gate did not accept responsibility for the poor performance of Black students in their classes and instead focused on how the administration, school counselors, school policies, and even the students themselves contributed to the AP gap.

Missing at both schools was a shared culture of collaboration among all school personnel, regardless of race, for supporting the participation and achievement of Black students in rigorous, college preparatory course work like AP. There was an absence of a collective sense of responsibility for addressing the AP gap at both schools. This had implications for the nature of the relationships that developed between AP teachers and Black students, as well as between AP teachers and the parents of their Black students. The next chapter explores the nature of these relationships and how they influenced each schools effort to increase the participation and academic achievement of Black students in AP courses.

Chapter 6: Relationships between Teachers, Black Students and their Parents

The previous chapter explored the influences of school cultures on teachers and staff at Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School as they worked to increase Black student participation and achievement in AP classes. While administrators at both schools were committed to addressing the AP gap, teachers and staff were not working collaboratively to make that happen. At both schools, administrators suggested that teachers bore the brunt of the responsibility for closing the AP gap. Since teachers were on the front-line in terms of their daily interactions with Black students in classrooms, administrators expected them to work in deliberate ways to develop productive relationships with Black students and to support their academic success.

Teachers and staff, however, perceived the under-representation of Black students in AP classes and their low achievement as someone else's problem. While Black teachers and staff claimed they accepted personal responsibility for the success of *all* of their students, they admitted that they often provided extra support and spent more time developing personal relationships with Black students and their parents than with White students and their parents. They scrutinized their White colleagues who they believed were not supporting Black students in equitable ways.

Meanwhile, White teachers and staff believed they were working to create productive relationships with *all* of their students, regardless of race, and suggested that one of the issues that prevented students, particularly Black students, from taking AP classes and achieving at high levels was students' unwillingness to work hard and put forth the extra effort required in these courses. The lack of ownership, particularly among

White AP teachers, at Robinson High and South Gate was an obstacle to collaboration among administrators, teachers, and school counselors in addressing the AP gap.

Another factor that prevented collaboration among teachers and staff in addressing the AP gap at both schools is race consciousness. In the last chapter I explored the different perceptions held by White teachers and Black teachers of the AP gap. While White teachers acknowledged the gap between White students and Black students, they not did perceive race as a problem. They did not openly talk about issues of race among themselves, in their department meetings, or with me during interviews. They did not believe that race was salient in their relationships with Black students. Instead, they attributed the AP gap to administrative policies, school structures, lack of Black student effort, and / or parent involvement. Black teachers and staff, however, were very conscious of race when they talked about the AP gap believed that a contributing factor was the absence of productive relationships between their White colleagues and Black students and between White and Black school personnel. Although, they too, engaged in finger pointing, particularly at their White colleagues, Black personnel were more invested on personal levels to address the Black-White AP gap.

This chapter explores how school cultures at Robinson High and South Gate influence and intersect with the attitudes White and Black teachers and staff have towards Black students and their parents. School cultures and teacher attitudes influence in profound ways the types of relationships that developed between school personnel and Black students and their parents. Understanding the nature of these relationships is important for addressing the AP gap.

Robinson High: Analyzing and Challenging the Dominant Narrative about Black Student Participation and Success in AP

White teachers at Robinson High, like teachers in many other high-achieving suburban schools in similar socio-economic communities across the nation, subscribed to a broader dominant narrative regarding the achievement gap. This narrative suggests that students of color achieve at lower levels than their White and Asian peers because they lack the motivation, work ethic and cultural capital necessary to succeed academically (Ferguson, 2002; Lareau, 2000, McWhorter, 2000). White AP teachers at Robinson High believed Black students were under-represented in AP classes and not achieving at high levels in those classes because they were unwilling to "work hard." For these teachers, evidence of hard work manifested itself in behaviors including, but not limited to, homework completion and performance on tests and other assessments. Ferguson (2003) suggested that teachers' perceptions, expectations and behaviors interact with students' beliefs, behaviors and work habits in ways that perpetuate the Black-White achievement gap in schools.

The achievement data at Robinson High paints the picture of a school where students perform well on a variety of standardized tests, including SATs and AP exams, earn high GPAs, and attend four year universities after high school. This picture, however, did not represent the reality for many Black students. The culture of achievement at Robinson High contributed to and supported the dominant narrative among White AP teachers about the under-representation and under-achievement of Black students in AP courses. In the following section I analyze the dominant narrative of the AP gap. In the subsequent sections I analyze perceptions of Black teachers, students

and parents to highlight the counter narrative; a narrative that is often silenced in conversations at Robinson High.

White Teachers Attitudes toward Black Students and their Parents

The prevailing culture of achievement had powerful influences on the attitudes of White AP teachers towards Black students and their parents. At a school where the majority of the students were taking many AP classes and achieving at high levels, White AP teachers believed that many Black students chose not to take AP classes because they did not want to "do more work". They also attributed the low achievement of Black students in their AP classes to Black students' "lack of effort" and to their lack of hard work.

AP English teacher Mr. Gorman left a predominantly Black school in a neighboring school district to teach students he characterized as "motivated" at Robinson High. According to him, the reason Black students did not choose to take AP classes or do well in them once there was because they were less willing to take intellectual risks:

> The Black students don't want to put the extra work in that it takes to succeed in
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> AP classes. It's almost a, 'I know what it means. That's as far as I want to go,'
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> and not that willingness to dig deeper into motifs or symbolism or whatever. The
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> Black student that I had last semester, she's a good student. She was a solid
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> student, but it was very much a, 'I'm not as willing, maybe, as some other
>
> students to pursue an idea, pursue a train of thought'. (4-18-07)

Another White AP social studies teacher talked about one Black male student in her class who ended up doing poorly and chose to drop the class mid-way through the semester. It was the first AP class he had ever taken and he was one of two Black students in the

class. When I asked why she thought he struggled so much and subsequently dropped the course she responded,

> I don't think he tried as hard as he could. And I told him that too. I was like, 'You're just not trying as hard as you could.' And he knew this stuff, and he was interested in it. He knew the concepts. It was just he didn't do the work. He didn't study for tests. And he came unprepared all the time. So it was just a lack of effort on his part. (3-15-07)

The culture of achievement at Robinson High influenced White AP teachers' perceptions of Black students. If the majority of students were inclined to take rigorous courses and achieve in them, what prevented Black students from doing the same? The answer for White AP teachers was that they *chose* not to.

Another White AP social studies teacher shared his belief that all AP students, regardless of race, needed to accept more responsibility for their learning,

> …there needs to be more and more burden placed on them for taking responsibility. And they need to be made more and more aware of what the consequences are if you're not holding up your end of the deal. So I like to see students more and more taking the initiative of coming to me if they need help, finding out what they're missing…There should be a little less hand-holding. (2-26-07)

The culture of achievement at Robinson High contributed to the attitudes among White AP teachers that students, regardless of race, were responsible for their own achievement. In a school where the majority of students achieved at high levels, they attributed poor performance in AP classes to students' lack of effort and willingness to work hard.

The correlation of hard work to high achievement is a commonly held inference among teachers nationally but may not necessarily explain differences in achievement between Black and White students. Ferguson (2002) analyzed survey data collected from Black, White, Latino, Asian, and mixed-race students in 95 schools across 15 middle- and upper-middle income school districts in ten states about their experiences in school. The survey was created in an attempt to gather information from students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to explore factors that might affect their engagement and achievement in school. Since the survey data were collected at one point in time, Ferguson did not attempt to use the data to distinguish causal relationships among variables. Instead he analyzed student perceptions by racial group to develop better understandings of difference between them.

The survey data were analyzed across and within the 15 different school districts and indicated that there were common forces at work across the various states and localities represented. Based on his analysis of these data, Ferguson (2002) found that Black students on average spent more time studying and working on homework than White students, but on average completed less homework than their White peers. In other words, Black students worked longer to complete the same amount of homework than White students. Ferguson suggested that, given the evidence from these surveys, teacher assumptions that achievement gaps between Black and White students may be attributed to Black students "not working hard enough" is likely unfounded.

White AP teachers at Robinson High, subscribing to the dominant narrative that "hard work" leads to "academic achievement", attributed the AP gap to student behaviors: they just did not want to work hard. The issue at Robinson High was that

Black students were overwhelmingly under-represented in AP courses and achieving at much lower levels than their White counterparts. In addition to this dominant narrative among White AP teachers, their "color-blind" attitudes towards low performing students and the resulting belief that they were treating all students equally, regardless of race, worked against the development of productive teacher-student relationships with Black students.

Despite the fact that this study focuses specifically on the under-representation and low achievement of Black students in AP courses, White AP teachers were typically reluctant to talk explicitly about race. When asked about Black students specifically, White teachers tended to couch their responses under the disclaimer that their responses were about all students, "regardless of race". When pushed to think specifically about issues that might influence Black students, they were reluctant to make definitive comments about this group of students. This was partly because they had very few Black students in their classes, less than three in each class, and did not want to generalize about all Black students based on these limited experiences. Instead, teachers talked generally about all students. During these conversations one theme emerged; teachers recognized that in order to increase student participation and academic achievement in AP classes it was important for them to establish a "good relationship" with students. They all referenced the over riding theme of the staff development activities at Robinson High that was centered on building productive teacher-student relationships. According to one White social studies AP teacher, laying a foundation for a good relationship was important for supporting student achievement in AP classes:

…the kids who aren't performing the way they could be, should be, there has to be

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time to take them aside and build that relationship a little bit more and find out

what's going on. 'Why aren't you doing the work' or 'Why are you struggling?'

And 'How can I help you? I'm here at lunch. I'm here after school. I can work

with you', you know, making that happen. (2-26-07)

These White teachers undoubtedly cared about their students, regardless of race.

Developing productive relationships with students was something White AP teachers at

Robinson High recognized as important and independent of race.

The principal, Dr. Ragan, recognized that the issue of race was a delicate one for

White teachers and admitted to "treading softly and cautiously" when initiating discourse

about race and student achievement with teachers:

In implementing our [School Improvement Plan], I knew I wanted to get our

teachers, particularly our White teachers, thinking about the ways they interact

with Black students and how that might be contributing to Black students decision

to take honors and AP classes. I mean, if word on the street is that when they take

a class they will be the 'only one' and that the teachers aren't going to encourage

and support them then they aren't going to take the classes. But how do I get

White teachers to really reflect on the way they interact with Black students

without them feeling like they are racist? I mean, if I start telling my White

teachers, 'Look, Black kids don't take your classes because they don't feel like

you care about them or that you're just outright racist', they're just going to get

defensive, withdraw from any discussion about it for fear of being labeled a racist,

and the conversation will cease. And that's not going to get us anywhere. (4-4-07)

Dr. Ragan firmly believed that in order to get White teacher buy-in and avoid their

resistance, he needed to start conversations about race in non-threatening ways. In Chapter five I mentioned that one White AP mathematics teacher who initially chose to participate in this study actually dropped out because she was not willing to engage in conversations about race. Her decision was precipitated by an intense exchange she had with a Black teacher during a staff development seminar on Black experiences with schooling. Feeling threatened and afraid of being labeled a racist, she chose to withdraw from any further conversations about race.

When asked to describe how they recruited Black students and supported them academically in AP classes, White AP teachers again were unwilling to talk specifically about Black students. White AP teachers at Robinson High had what they perceived to be "color-blind" attitudes towards Black students and believed that they treated their students in equitable ways. One process they identified for increasing the participation and academic achievement of students in AP was developing relationships with students. This involved personal invitations and encouragement to register for AP classes and providing "extra support" to those who were struggling by being available to help them during lunch and after school. These White teachers interpreted the "invitation" to participate and "offer of extra help" as sufficient in demonstrating that they cared about their students. They believed that doing these things was evidence that they were actively trying to develop productive relationships with their students. When asked why despite their best efforts they thought the AP gap at Robinson High persisted, they always reverted back to the idea that the students themselves were to blame; that they chose not to take the courses and were not doing well because they did not *want* to put in the work required of rigorous courses like AP.

Contemporary scholars have argued that in the post-Civil Rights period, while racism has not completely disappeared, outright racism has become less socially acceptable. As a result society has shifted from engaging in "overt" racism to more subtle "colorblind racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Carr, 1997; Tarca, 2005) and from "traditional" to "laissez-Faire" racism (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997). According to Tarca (2005):

This ideology embraces mounting American individualism, transferring group-based explanations of disparities between Blacks and Whites to individual-based rationales. Using this ideology, Whites can appear to embrace 'equality for all' while maintaining a belief in the inferiority of Black individuals. (p. 99)

White AP teachers did not differentiate between students based on race but rather based on academic performance. They talked about how they recruited students in general and supported their "struggling" students, "regardless of race". At Robinson, the Black-White AP gap is a reality indicating that attention to issues of race is pertinent. As Tarca suggested, color-blind ideology is related to the concept of social equality and "helps blur the clarity of this inequity and confound public efforts to understand or address it" (p. 104).

Evidence of this color-blind ideology was manifest in White AP teachers' tendency to individualize issues related to the AP gap. Rather than conceptualizing disparities between Black and White student achievement as a function of institutional racism, or perhaps even their own mis- and pre-conceptions of Black students, color-blind ideologies support their beliefs that individual student deficiencies account for problems experienced by the entire group. In other words, Black students, or any group that does not assimilate to the culture of achievement at Robinson, are to blame for their

own under-achievement. This approach relieves those who employ it from the responsibility of working in deliberate ways to address the Black-White AP gap.

None of the White teachers had negative perceptions of Black parents. When asked if they thought Black parents contributed to the AP gap by perhaps not encouraging their children to take rigorous courses or supporting them at home, all of the White AP teachers believed that, quite to the contrary, Black parents were very concerned about the academic performance of their children and had high expectations of them. As one teacher put it, "I hesitate to--you know, I don't want to over-generalize and make sweeping statements. I see a lot of minority students, African-American and others who it's very obvious their parents are very involved and committed and that shows" (2-26-07).

White AP teachers also claimed to be color-blind in their attitudes towards Black parents. They believed that the culture of achievement at Robinson High was shared by all parents, regardless of race. Students who did not assimilate to that culture *chose* not to do so, oftentimes to the chagrin of their parents. When asked specifically about Black parents, one White AP English teacher noted:

> I don't want to fall into clichés, and I don't think I can speak very authoritatively on this. My impression, in general, the black parents that I have come into contact with, many of them--certainly, you know, teaching honor students, they're concerned that their students do well. They're concerned that their children are achieving; they were pushing their kid. They were motivating their kid. In general, the parent contacts that I've had with black parents--and this is this school; it's a fairly academically-motivated school. The black parents are firm.

They're encouraging. They're pressuring their kids. They're saying, 'Where are you applying to college? Why haven't you had any college applications?' I see from the Black parents a real demand for good grades. 'You need to do well. You need to do your best'. (4-18-07)

But for this White AP teacher, as well as the others, this behavior was common to all parents of students in rigorous high school courses. According to another White AP English teacher, race was an irrelevant factor in considering the level of parent support:

I didn't see a difference actually in [Black] parental activity or involvement. It's hard for me to answer what my perception is of how they view schooling and support their kids because…I didn't see much of a racial difference of any kind. (3-12-07)

Teachers' color-blind attitudes towards Black students and their parents resulted in what they considered equal treatment. When Black students were struggling in their AP classes they relied on the same protocol they followed for all struggling students: talk to student about coming in for extra help and notify parents of problems. They rarely if ever gave differential treatment, or as one White AP teacher put it "preferential treatment", to any struggling student based on race. When a Black student wanted to drop a course or was struggling, White AP teachers were not any more concerned because of the student's race. Believing that Black parents, like all parents, wanted their children to do well and were supportive of their academic achievement, they simply attributed the behavior to students' lack of motivation to do well or to put forth the extra effort necessary to succeed in rigorous courses. As a result, they seldom put forth extra effort to develop relationships with Black students or their parents. Regardless of race, they

believed that at a school like Robinson High, student success depended on students' willingness to work hard and be proactive in getting help when they needed it. For White AP teachers, the onus for success was on the student, rather than on the teacher.

Black Teachers Attitudes about Race: "The Elephant in the Room"

As I discussed in Chapter five, both Black AP teachers in this study, Ms. East and Mr. Michaels, as well as the Black school counselor Ms. Simpson and the Black assistant principal Ms. McNair, were extremely conscious of the significance of race in understanding the AP gap at Robinson High. While White AP teachers were reluctant to talk about race, these teachers and staff foreground the salience of race in teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. School counselor Ms. Simpson put it bluntly when she said, "In terms of race relations in this school, there are racist teachers…and our students are suffering because of it. I didn't think coming into this situation that it was going to be as bad as it is, but it's a lot worse than I ever thought it would be" (4-20-07). According to Ms. East, the issue of race at Robinson High was the "elephant in the room that White teachers don't want to talk about" (3-23-07). As a member of Dr. Ragan's project team to address the AP gap and co-coordinator of the Minority Honors Society (MHS) at Robinson High, Ms. East was intimately involved in conversations with the administration, Black colleagues and Black students about the under-representation and low achievement of Black students in AP courses.

According to Ms. East and Mr. Michaels one of the major obstacles in addressing the AP gap is the lack of productive relationships between White teachers and Black students at Robinson High. As coordinators of the MHS, which was designed to create a support system for Black students taking honors and AP classes, Ms. East and Mr.

Michaels administered surveys to and interviewed focus groups of Black students to find out from them why they made decisions to take AP classes and, more importantly, what they needed from their teachers in order to succeed academically. Overwhelmingly students talked about not feeling welcome, particularly by the White teachers who taught the courses. Students shared stories about registering for AP courses and walking into classes the first day to hear their teachers say to them, "Oh, you're in this class?" or "What are you doing here?" According to Mr. Michaels:

> When we shared this information with teachers at a faculty meeting at the beginning of the year the initial reaction of almost all teachers was, 'Not me. Not me. I don't do that. I treat everyone equally. I don't look at color. I'm colorblind. Blah, blah, blah...' A lot of White teachers who are very liberal feel that, oh, well, I'm just colorblind. I treat everybody equally. And they don't realize that they actually are not! (3-2-07)

Black students in the MHS openly shared with Mr. Michaels and Ms. East that they typically did feel welcomed by teachers or by White students in the classes. When I spoke to Ms. East about this she talked extensively about the "only one" phenomenon; that many Black students are the only Black student in their AP classes and feel isolated as a result. She also explained how the demographic nature of the community contributed to de facto segregation in the school. White students, whose families had lived in the community for generations, typically grew up together and knew each other since elementary school. Many of the Black students, on the other hand, whose families were relatively new to the community and small in numbers, had not developed friendships or relationships with White students at the school at young ages. As a result, there were

cliques in the school and they were typically based on race. Additionally, since many of the White students had been in gifted and talented middle school tracks and many of the Black students had not necessarily attended middle school in the school district, White students were typically well represented in honors and AP classes and Black students were typically under-represented.

As I also discussed in Chapter five, both Ms. East and Mr. Michaels believed their schooling experiences were similar to the experiences among Black students at Robinson High. Both attended predominantly White high schools and empathized with the feelings of isolation Black students at Robinson High experienced in their AP classes. As mentors to students in the MHS, they developed personal relationships with Black students that fostered communication and contributed to their insights of these students' experiences with White AP teachers. According to Mr. Michaels:

> I know what these kids are going through because it wasn't too long ago I also felt the same way in my high school AP classes. When they open up and tell me their stories I can relate. And they open up to me, not because I'm Black, but because I care. (3-2-07)

Both Ms. East and Mr. Michaels believed that race was not a factor in productive teacher-student relationships, but that it seemed to be a factor for White teachers at Robinson High. Mr. Michaels talked about an incident at a staff meeting during the planning phase of MHS the year before. A teacher had questioned their work with the MHS, arguing that it was not fair to provide special support specifically for Black students. This teacher was concerned that creating a program for supporting Black students would send a stigmatizing message about Black students and also raises the issue of whether every

ethnic group at the school should have their own "support group". Mr. Michaels commented:

> Someone said, 'Well, we don't mean any harm, but you guys are there for the Black students. No one's there for the Latino students.' And we had to say, 'Well, I beg your pardon. We're Black but it doesn't mean that we're not there for the Latino students'…And like I was mentioning before, both Ms. [East] and I have done a lot of work with the Hispanic Heritage Club, even though we're not the sponsors of it. So I don't think there has ever been a student who's had any concern about the fact that we're not Latino. I think they just understand that we are strong advocates for them, regardless. (3-2-07)

In raising the issue of creating support groups for students based on their race, Mr. Michaels suggested that his White colleagues were "more conscious of race than they cared to admit". White teachers at Robinson High, despite claims that they did not see color, actually did. Ms. East believed that there was a misconception among her White colleagues that because she was Black, she was best suited to support Black students. In Chapter five I indicated her belief that the creation of the MHS gave White teachers an "out" in developing relationships with Black students:

> There is this overall sense of, 'I'm having a problem with a black student. Let me go tell [Abigail] and [Will], and they'll do something about it,' just a lack of ownership, that these [MHS] kids are not [Abigail] and [Will's] kids; they're everybody's kids. They're all of our kids…And I think our teachers at [Robinson High] want to be a part of helping all kids succeed, but I think whether they feel like they don't know how to relate to some of these kids or whether they really

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feel like they don't want to deal with their own misconceptions and stereotypes or their own preconceived ideas about these kids, or whether some of them--their political views. They view this as an affirmative action program where they don't agree with looking at race. (3-23-07)

Both Ms. East and Mr. Michaels believed that their White colleagues cared about their students and bought into the idea that developing relationships with students was important in supporting their academic achievement. However, they also believed that White AP teachers at Robinson High were unwilling to evaluate their own attitudes about race; attitudes that prevented them from developing productive relationships with students who were racially and ethnically different from them. These attitudes and the lack of productive teacher-student relationships had detrimental effects for Black students who were struggling and needed to not only be supported, but feel supported by their White AP teachers.

According to Nel Noddings (2001), "care" may manifest itself in a variety of ways and for that reason cannot be rigidly defined by the carers, or in this case, teachers. Noddings argued that if we accept that teaching is a relational concept, involving the complex interactions of teachers and students through which learning is accomplished, then behaviors or attitudes that constitute caring would be better understood by the responses of the cared-for; in this case Black students. According to Ms. East and Mr. Michaels, simply offering to give students extra help and saying "my door is always open" is not enough. If students do not feel comfortable, if they do not feel as though their teacher really cares about them and is invested in their success, they will not take up these offers. In such a context, where White teachers believed the onus was on the child

to seek out help and "work hard", addressing the AP gap was not likely to happen without intentional and explicit intervention.

Assistant principal Ms. McNair talked about the issues she constantly faced with White teachers at the school who, despite their color-blind rhetoric, actually treated students of color differently than White students. As an assistant principal, she regularly met with teachers to discuss student performance; her main goal was to ensure that teachers were doing everything possible to support student achievement. She described a typical conversation with a White teacher about a struggling student of color:

> 'Okay. Can you give me specifics as far as what is going on with this kid? What is it?' 'Well, he just doesn't do his work.' 'Okay. Why?' 'Well, I don't know.' 'Well, have you called home?' 'Well, no. I don't want to call home.' 'Well, why wouldn't you call home?' 'Well, you know his mother might be angry.' Okay. So we've made assumptions already? And this is an actual conversation that I had with a teacher. She was afraid to gather data, get more information, to figure out how she could help this kid. And if everyone, which is a lot of teachers, don't do that because of their perceptions already of how a parent is going to receive their phone call. And I never have this conversation with them about a White child. Never. 'What did you do?' 'Oh, I called his mother. I emailed his mother to let her know that he skipped my class, that he did not do his…' Well, why didn't you do that for your Black or Latino kid? I think a lot of their fears and views on race keep them from making that extra effort supporting kids." (4-24-07)

Even though the White AP teachers who participated in this study talked about treating all students the same and following the same protocols for supporting struggling students, regardless of race, Ms. McNair argued from her experiences that that may not be the case.

The inability or unwillingness of White AP teachers at Robinson High to establish productive relationships with Black students and their parents influenced student attitudes toward White teachers and the AP classes they taught. Black students who do not feel welcome or supported in AP classes taught by predominantly White teachers come to expect "uncaring" from White teachers. Those who have negative experiences with White teachers share those experiences with their peers which may contribute to the unlikelihood that they will register for these classes. Black students who do not feel cared-for by the White teachers are likely to drop them at the first signs of struggle. These issues contribute to the AP gap.

Black Students' and Parents' Perceptions of AP Teachers

Analysis of Black student and parent interviews demonstrated the ways race and class intersect and influence interactions and relationships between them and AP teachers at Robinson High. While none of the 14 Black AP students and parents interviewed for this study claimed that teachers were responsible for determining students' academic success or failure, all of them shared negative experiences regarding interactions with White AP teachers at Robinson High. However, they seldom attributed these experiences to issues of race. Students perceived teachers as either "good" or "bad" and defined the qualities of each based on specific teacher behaviors and actions, not on their race. Black students were, however, conscious of race as often the only or one of few Black students in AP classes. Parents, while conscious of the role race may play in the interactions

between their children and White AP teachers, also talked about the influence of class privilege in these relationships.

Black Students: "A Good Teacher is a Good Teacher"

Based on a range of indicators, Black AP students at Robinson High appeared to be as motivated and hard-working as their White peers and most take multiple AP classes. Five of the Black AP student participants in this study were taking one AP class at the time of this study, five were taking two AP classes, two were taking three AP classes, one was taking four AP classes, and one remarkable senior, Miriama, was taking six. These students were also actively involved as student leaders and tutors in the MHS, in the Black Student Union, and a variety of other extracurricular and athletic organizations at Robinson High. Among student participants, GPAs ranged between 2.8 and 4.0. The highest GPA belonged to the student taking four AP classes at the time of this study. All of them planned to attend four-year universities after high school, had parents that supported and encouraged them to do well academically, and unfortunately shared similar experiences in their interactions with White AP teachers at Robinson High.

One of the purposes of this study is to examine Black AP students' experiences in and perceptions of AP classes, not assuming that those experiences and perceptions are necessarily unique to Black students. It is possible that White students or students from a variety of other racial and / or ethnic backgrounds shared similar experiences and perceptions of AP teachers. The focus of this research, however, is to consider the experiences of Black students and how they may contribute to the problems of under representation and low achievement in AP classes.

During interviews students never explicitly talked about the race of their AP teachers. They instead categorized AP teachers as either "good" or "bad". However, I knew what AP teachers they had; both the courses they taught and their race. Robinson only had two Black AP teachers: Ms. East and Mr. Michaels. The Black students in this study were in AP classes taught by either one of the two Black teachers or a White teacher. When students talked about the "bad" AP teachers, Ms. East and Mr. Michaels were not referenced. In instances where students had either Ms. East or Mr. Michaels for an AP class, they typically referenced to them as examples of "good" teachers. When asked what makes a teacher a "good" teacher one Black AP student, Miriama, responded:

> A good teacher is a good teacher. They make you feel welcome every day and never make you feel bad about yourself. They get to know who you are. Not just in school as a student. They understand when you have a lot on your plate-especially as AP students who are also involved in other things like sports and leadership stuff at school. When we need help they are there for us. And sometimes when we don't even know we need help they are there for us, making us come in at lunch and stay after school. They know how to relate to us. Good teachers actually care about their students. (5-1-07)

Miriama was a senior taking six AP classes at the time of this study. Her response was representative of the majority of the student responses to this question of what makes a good teacher "good" and put into context, was actually how she described Ms. East, an AP teacher she believed demonstrated the qualities "good" teachers should have. For Iyesha, another quality of a "good" teacher is "approachability":

I think 'approachability' does make a big difference to students in general. Approachability, when it comes to teachers, mainly involves the way you present yourself to a class. Teachers who are more approachable to a student are those who remind them that they can always come in for help and who talk to students about problems they might be having. This makes students more comfortable with the teacher and sometimes establishes great friendships such as the teacher becoming a mentor for the student. (5-7-07)

Other students also talked about teachers being "down to earth", being "real people", and being able to "relate to us on our level".

So what makes an AP teacher "bad"? According to the AP students in this study it's all about relationships. I asked Miriama to think about one of her AP teachers that she would label as "bad" and then to describe what made that teacher a bad teacher:

He just doesn't care. In the beginning of the year whenever I'd ask a question he'd make me feel dumb, like duh, that's a stupid question or something like that. Then I never felt comfortable going in for help when I didn't understand stuff. He just wasn't very nice and I feel like teachers are supposed to be nice to us! So I just shut down. I mean, I still kept my grades up because I got help from my friends and went to tutoring with [MHS] but I never really, how do you say it, got involved in class anymore. (5-1-07)

Miriama felt like her AP teacher did not really care about her and as a result she "shut down", preventing her from developing a productive relationship him and from receiving the additional academic support she not only needed to be successful, but wanted. Every student in this study had at least one story to share about feeling marginalized and

unsupported by their AP teachers. And again, none of these stories were about Ms. East or Mr. Michaels.

Although most of the student participants did not have the experience shared earlier by Mr. Michaels, of being looked at questionably by White AP teachers when they entered AP classes for the first time, they had all heard about these experiences from their peers. Miriama shared one such story:

> In [MHS] we had this meeting last semester and it was like a social to bring us all together and get to know each other. When Ms. [East] started asking us about how our AP classes were going there were a lot of kids who talked about their teachers making them feel like they weren't supposed to be there. They were like all shocked to see them. I remember [Jaleel] saying how Ms. [Armstrong] raised her eyebrows at him the first day of class and was like, 'Aren't you playing football this season? You know this class has a lot of reading.' At first I didn't believe him but then [Dominique] said she said the same thing to her, something about you might want to switch out because of the amount of reading. (5-1-07)

Theodore shared his experience with this initial attitude from his White AP English teacher:

> Yeah, like the first day of class she made this big scene! I walked in a little late 'cause [the school counseling department] had messed up my schedule and she was like, 'Are they going to switch your schedule again? You know this is an AP class?' And when I told her I knew that, that's the reason I was there- you know, I want to major in Journalism when I go to college, so that's why I wanted to take the class. She kept on going, in front of the whole class about how much reading

and writing it was and that I probably should think about that before it's too late to switch out. (5-1-07)

Although Black students in this study did not single out White AP teachers specifically as being "bad" and did not identify race as an explicit criteria for defining "good" or "bad" teachers, they were cognizant of race; their own and their peers in AP classes. Using inductive processes during data analysis, one of the codes that emerged from student interview data was "Only One". An analysis of data double-coded "Only One" and "Perceptions of AP classes" turned up interview data from all student participants at Robinson. Without ever being asked about the demographic make-up of their AP classes, all of the students in this study referenced in some way that they were either the only Black student in their AP classes or one of a few.

For Theodore, the reason he was upset by the teacher's interaction with him the first day of class was because he was the only Black student in the class and felt stigmatized in front of his White peers by the exchange:

I mean, I don't really care what they think. They're not my friends anyway. But she didn't have to put me out there like that! She made me look stupid or lazy or something. I mean and I'm the only brotha in the class! So of course I stand out. Then she always wanted us to do group work and shit and none of the other kids in the class ever looked at me when they were hooking up. It's like they thought I was stupid too and didn't want me in their groups. One time [the teacher] actually threw me out of class for fighting with this one punk who tried to tell me I didn't know what I was talking about! She didn't even listen when I was trying to explain what happened. I mean, I thought that's what we were supposed to do in

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AP classes- talk and debate and argue and shit! Not just sit there like…I don't

know, a bunch of idiots and just agree with each other. (5-1-07)

Jaleel also felt self-conscious in one of his AP classes as the only Black student and as a

result of what he perceived as differential treatment from the teacher:

I try not to say too much in class. I always feel like when [the teacher] calls on me

the room gets real quiet and everybody's just waiting to see what I'm going to

say- like I got something amazing to put out there. I'm the only African American

in the class. Then, sometimes, I purposely say some crazy shit to see what will

happen and she always hypes it up like I said something so great. And everybody

can tell she treats me different. I mean, if [a White student in the class] said the

same shit I say during discussions, she would call her out on it. But it's like she

doesn't really care what I say. And everybody knows it- they all think they're

smarter than me. On the real, I know what I know and I don't need them to

recognize it. (5-7-07)

While students were aware of their own difference amidst the homogeneity of

their AP classes and shared stories like Theodore's and Jaleel's, none of them ever talked

about feeling ostracized or "different" from their White peers in Ms. East or Mr.

Michaels' AP classes. According to Miriama:

There's like three of us in Ms. East's class but it's cool. None of the White kids

ever acts like they're better and makes us feel like we're different. I know the

other two [Black] girls in the class and we used to always try to do group stuff

together but Ms. East would always split us up! I never really talked to [a White

student] before this class, even though we been known each other since middle

school. But now we're actually cool, she's one of my best friends this year. (5-1-07)

To put this quote in context, Miriama shared this experience in Ms. East's class after talking about feeling "shut down" in another AP class she was taking, a class taught by a White teacher. Based on the data and my knowledge of the identities of AP teachers at Robinson, six different White AP teachers were used as examples by student participants of "bad" teachers. None of the stories by Black students of feeling "different" were situated in Ms. East or Mr. Michaels AP classes where they were also either the only Black student or one of few. I can not make any definitive claims based on the data regarding why this may be the case, but given the fact that these students classified both Black AP teachers as "good" teachers, it may partly be attributed to the nature of the relationships they had with these teachers.

All 14 Black students in this study were also members of the Minority Honors Society (MHS). Students all shared the importance of MHS to them in terms of providing them with a community outside of their AP classes where they felt safe, welcome, and supported. According to Iyesha:

No matter what happens in class, like if I don't get it or if my teacher won't help me, I always know I can go to Ms. East or Mr. Michaels. They're like always here after school and—like Ms. East always tells us, 'The door is always open.' And it really is! And even if they're not there, there's always other MHS kids there that I can talk to. And sometimes it's not only about school work. Sometimes I just need to talk out the drama. 'Cause these [AP] teachers be stressin' me for real! (5-7-07)

As coordinators of MHS, Ms. East and Mr. Michaels work closely with the Black student participants and their parents. They held weekly meetings with the students, monitored their academic progress, and communicated frequently with their parents. In addition, the coordinators also worked with MHS students to plan activities including guest speakers, field trips, and tutoring sessions. Ms. East and Mr. Michaels' work with Black students in the MHS contributed to their development of productive teacher-student relationships with these students.

The students in this study talked about how important their peers were in information sharing about AP teachers and while most of them were not dissuaded from taking AP classes by the stories that circulated, they did have Black friends who were. For high school sophomore Kendra, it was these stories that led her best friend to opt out of AP classes, making it the first year they were not in the same classes:

> I mean me and [Regina] been in the same classes since middle school. That's why we ended up best friends. We were always together, in classes, at church, in [clubs at school]. But when she heard about [the AP Calculus and English teachers] and how nasty they were and they never gave you extra help, she was like, 'I'm out!' My mom wasn't havin' it so I had to stay and it's been crazy- and she's always like, 'See, I told you.' (5-7-07)

Peer influence was not a determining factor for the Black AP students in this study in terms of registering for AP classes. All of the students attributed their desire to take the classes to parent encouragement and belief that these courses were important for college admission. Despite that, the information sharing that occurs between Black students about AP teachers does contribute to the under-representation of Black students

in AP classes at Robinson High. The student participants referred to "the word on the street", or the stories that students shared about teachers, as an important factor in their peers' decisions whether or not to take AP classes.

Black Parents: "What Ever Happened to 'It Takes a Village'?"

All of the Black parents in this study believed that race was a significant factor in the schooling of their children in America and specifically at Robinson High. All of the parents spoke highly of the Jones Mill School District and of Robinson High. Of the 14 parents in this study, nine were immigrants from other countries and had no personal experiences as students in American schools. The other five were Black Americans and, while not originally from the area, were schooled in the American system. All of the parents in this study believed that the JMSD, and particularly Robinson High, provided their children with excellent educational opportunities. All nine cited the school district's reputation for academic excellence as one of the contributing factors in their decisions to move there. They were also familiar with Robinson High's "culture of achievement" and cited that as another important reason for enrolling their children there.

Another common element among these parents is that all of their children, the student participants in this study, were in the MHS. Parents in this study were all familiar with the goals of MHS. All of the parents had positive comments to share about their child's involvement in the program and the work of the coordinators Ms. East and Mr. Michaels. They all applauded the work of the coordinators and believed that the relationships their children had developed with them and their MHS peers were largely responsible for their academic achievement.

Despite their acknowledgement of the potential benefits offered by Robinson High, and especially the MHS, all of the parents believed that their children were not getting the same attention and support as White students did from their White teachers. The interview protocol for parents was loosely structured to allow them to them guide the conversation, an approach intended to mine for their true feelings rather than box them into desired positions (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Interviews started with questions aimed at gathering general background information. In most cases parent beliefs about the historical implications of segregation and racial inequality in schools emerged as they shared their background stories. Again, using inductive processes, codes that emerged from the interview data included "Perceptions of schooling in America", "Racial Inequality", and "Low teacher expectations". Analysis of parent interviews that included these three codes demonstrated that all of the parents believed that racial inequality in American schools was still prevalent, even at Robinson, and contributed to the inattention to their children by the predominantly White teachers and staff at Robinson High.

For Jaleel's mother, an African American woman who attended high school in the deep south during the 1960's, not much had changed for Black students in public schools:

Whether you're a person of color or you're White, if you're in a classroom where everybody is striving for success, and you got a teacher that's loving and striving and pushing you, and you got parents supporting you, then you can grow. But somewhere along the line we have lost that. I mean whatever happened to 'It takes a village'? I brought [Jaleel] to this school system because I thought they believed in quality education for all children. I come from first generation integration. So I know how it is to be the only African-American in a classroom

where everybody else is another color. And you got to be super smart. I know

how it feels to be that way, and that's what I tell [Jaleel]. And the only difference

is that he tells me it's subtle now, wherein as when I was his age it was more

apparent. (5-23-07)

Black parents also believed that they had to be proactive in communicating with

White teachers about their child's progress and, as Theodore's father put it, that the

"squeaky wheel gets the oil",

I have never been able to get a hold of the teachers. I don't know if they are too

busy or what, but they seem to have their preferred students, frankly. That's what

I noticed. There are some students that have easy access to them, and some don't.

And the ones who do, well, they've been in this community for a very long time.

They own the community. I'm, of course, talking about the White students and

their families. And [the teachers] never hesitate to contact the White parents when

their children are not doing well, but then they are always knocking at their doors.

They may be too busy to reach out to people who are not always knocking. I think

it should be the opposite; they should try to reach out to every student, try to call

them once in while just to chat to get a feel instead of waiting for them to go to

them. If I don't make a fuss and call the principal, they never try to contact me or

help [Theodore]…I always have to intervene. (5-1-07)

Miriama's mother believed part of the problem with the White teachers at

Robinson High was that if they did not "see" parents actively involved in their child's

schooling then they did not take time to attend to the child's needs. As a single mother of

two teenage daughters, with no car and relying on public transportation to commute to

work each day, it was difficult, if not impossible, for her to be "visible" at the school for events like PTA meetings or parent-teacher night. She commented:

> This is not right. It's not about what the parents are doing in this school system. It's the kids first, for me. Because the kids, they don't have to be blamed for the availability of their parents. And you know this life here, it's tough. Sometimes parents have to do two or three jobs to take care of their family. So if they don't have time to volunteer in the PTA--I used to do it when she was in elementary school and in middle school, but in high school, I couldn't. I am by myself. I have just one salary. So I will give my job from seven to five. Before I get home, it's 6:00, 6:15. So if the parents don't have time to be volunteers in the school system, I don't think that our kids should have to pay for that. If [Miriama] tells me, 'Mom, you have a meeting at school. This is your time you have to go.' I say, 'Okay.' I look at my schedule. I say, 'It doesn't work.' I see on her face she's worried. Even now, she's a senior, but she look at me like, 'You have to go, Mom. You know what? You have to go,' and I see the anxiety, you know, in her eyes. I see the nervousness. It means a lot because if I don't the teachers will think badly of her. And that is not fair. (5-9-07)

Miriama's mother was one of nine single-mother parents in this study. All of the single mothers talked about how difficult it was for them to "get involved" in events at the school and believed that their "invisibility" contributed to the belief by White teachers at Robinson High that they did not care about education or the education of their children. One mother remarked:

> My girls know how important education is! I tell them all the time, "Look at me.

You don't want to be like me. I'm an example of what not to do." I got pregnant

as a teenager, dropped out of school and never went to college. I struggle every

day to give my girls the best. And they see that. And I tell them all the time they

have to go to college so they don't have to live like this. But it's not fair to them

when their teachers judge them because of my mistakes. They deserve to be

treated equal to those kids whose parents have it easier and can get involved in

school events. (4-26-07)

This belief that the inability to be visible at school events impacted the

relationships they had with White teachers and between those teachers and their children

was also held by parents in two-parent homes. These parents also believed that unless

they initiated contact with White AP teachers about their child's progress they would

never find out how they were doing until interim reports or report cards were mailed

home. According to Theodore's father:

In terms of reaching out, the only thing we get is the interim. But I think that if

you notice that somebody's kind of failing, I think it would be wise to send an

email. I think it's wise to bring it to the parents' attention. And then if the parents

don't react, then you say, 'Okay, I did my job', but you just don't wait to get an

interim grade and say, 'Oh, my god.' And that's all we get. And then the kids will

not tell you if they are failing. And then the next thing you know, you get the

interim grade, and then you find out. They can just shoot an E-mail to the parents

and just say, 'I just wanted to bring this to your attention. Let's see how we can

help [Theodore] because dah, dah, dah, dah.' But it never happened. (5-1-07)

The experiences of Black parents were consistent with those of the assistant principal Ms.

McNair, who talked about her concerns that White teachers at Robinson High failed to maintain open communication with the parents of students of color.

Black parents in this study believed they had to be more proactive than White parents in advocating for their children to get the same quality of education. They believed that their inability to be actively involved in school activities and events contributed to White teacher attitudes towards them and their children. Again, this does not necessarily mean their experiences are unique or based solely on race. There may have been parents of other races and ethnicities at Robinson High who also believed their children were not being adequately supported by teachers. Perhaps class differences, more so than race, contributed to parent "invisibility" and the resulting teacher attitudes. Since this study sought to explore the problem of under-representation and low achievement of Black students in AP classes, the focus of analyses is on the perceptions of Black parents about teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. The parents in this study all responded that the two Black AP teachers at Robinson High, who are also the coordinators of the MHS, were the only two AP teachers with whom both they and their children had positive relationships. None reported having such relationships with the White AP teachers at the school.

Productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships are important in supporting students' academic achievement (Lareau, 2000; Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999), particularly in rigorous academic tracks (Ford & Grantham, 2003). At Robinson High, these relationships were strained by a variety of factors. White teachers' perceptions of Black students were influenced by both the achievement culture at the school and the dominant narrative regarding student achievement. At a school where the

majority of students achieved at high levels, White AP teachers believed that low achieving students were not working hard enough. Believing they were "color-blind" in their attitudes towards their AP students, these teachers suggested that they did not differentiate their interactions with students or parents based on race.

However, Black teachers, staff, students and parents all believed this was not the case. Black school personnel believed that White AP teachers not only did *see* color, but were afraid to acknowledge that it influenced their relationships with Black students and their parents. They suggested that White AP teachers interacted with Black students and their parents differently than they did with White students and parents. Black students and parents perceived they were treated differently by White AP teachers and believed that it was based on intersections of race and class. These different perceptions among Black school personnel, students and parents and among White AP teachers influenced the development of productive student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships. It also contributed to the lack of collaboration between school personnel and parents in addressing the AP gap at Robinson High.

South Gate High School: Analyzing and Challenging Deficit Models

Although South Gate was not viewed as a high achieving school, White teachers at South Gate also adopted the dominant narrative regarding the AP that is prevalent among high achieving suburban schools. The school was demographically different from Robinson High; students of color were the majority and students in general, regardless of race, lived in lower socio-economic communities than their counterparts at Robinson High. Achievement test scores and graduation rates were much lower among students at South Gate, contributing to a school culture based on accountability. However, the

demographics of the AP teacher pool at South Gate were similar to those of Robinson

High. There were only two Black AP teachers at Robinson High and one at South Gate.

The majority of AP teachers at both schools are White. Similar to the situation at

Robinson High, White AP teachers at South Gate perceived the under-representation and

under-achievement of Black students in AP courses as primarily a function of their

unwillingness to "work hard". Additionally, and likely a function of the socio-economic

characteristics of the community at large, White AP teachers at South Gate believed that

Black AP students were disadvantaged by limited opportunities at home for attaining rich

social and cultural capital; capital that is vital to their participation and success in

rigorous AP courses.

In what follows, I analyze the beliefs and perceptions White AP teachers had of

Black students at South Gate and consider how these beliefs, as part of the dominant

narrative, influenced teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. In subsequent

sections I analyze the counter narratives as told through the eyes of: 1) Black teachers

and staff, 2) Black students, and 3) Black parents at South Gate.

White Teachers: Deficit Models Influence Relationships

Similar to their colleagues at Robinson High, White AP teachers at South Gate

claimed to be "color-blind" in their attitudes and interactions with students. This may be

attributed to two dynamics: the culture of accountability and demographics of the student

population. White teachers, working in a school where the majority of students were not

White, believed that race had nothing to do with the way they interacted with students.

They typically talked about being equitable in their practices. They suggested that they

did not *see* race and, just like their colleagues at Robinson High, often talked about

students in two generic categories: those who were high achieving and those who were not. Despite their recognition of the existence of Black-White AP gap at South Gate, they suggested that the race of students was not necessarily at issue but rather that there were too many under-prepared and involuntarily placed students in AP classes. The issue at South Gate, just as at Robinson High, was that Black students were under-represented and under-achieving in AP classes.

Given that White AP teachers were using labels like "struggling" and "high-achieving" to differentiate their students, I asked them to tell me in approximate terms what percentage of their "struggling" students were Black. They all seemed apprehensive at first. Most of them had a difficult time identifying the percentages of Black students in their classes, much less how many were struggling. Then they typically said they had no idea and would need to look at their rosters before they could answer. AP social studies teacher Ms. Strausberg responded, "I'm trying to picture all the faces of my kids because when I teach, I don't really think about the colors and races." (3-16-07) Another AP science teacher responded similarly, "Actually, I don't know. Can I just take a look at my roster? Because I really, honestly, I don't notice. I just don't notice it. I think because I'm concentrating on other things. I just don't think about it." (3-13-07) The White AP teachers inability to quickly identify, even in approximate terms, Black student representation in their classes may have been because, unlike Robinson High, many of them had large numbers of Black students in their AP classes. After looking at their rosters, two said that about 30% of their AP students were Black and one believed it was about 25%. The other two teachers had small classes of 10 students and said that they each had two Black AP students.

When asked to consider why, in a school with such large numbers of Black students, Black students were under-represented in their AP classes and not achieving as high as White students, the most common belief among White AP teachers was that many Black students were either not ready for the rigor or willing to work hard. They also pointed to administrative responses to school district pressures to increase AP enrollment which led to large numbers of under-prepared and unmotivated students being placed in AP classes. Placement issues were a serious issue for Ms. Strausberg:

I kind of have to try to figure out which ones actually should be in the class and then which ones were not placed correctly. And I'll try to get the ones that weren't placed correctly moved to a lower level if I feel like they can't have success in my class. However, most of the time, they're stuck; they stay in AP…. So a lot of the problem I've noticed with some of these students who were not placed correctly is that they just don't have the desire to succeed, or even try. They just kind of just stay in the class and not do anything. (3-16-07)

Other White AP teachers shared similar concerns about placement issues and their frustrations with having to teach "disinterested" and "unmotivated" students rigorous curriculum. According to one AP science teacher:

I can tell when they aren't getting something or understanding by the blank looks on their faces. But when I ask them what they need help with they give that typical high school response, 'I don't know.' They just don't really care about this stuff is what is it. Most of them tried to get out of the class but [the counseling department] wouldn't let them drop. So instead they sit in here and do nothing. And I can't help a student who doesn't care. If they don't care why should I? (3-

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13-07)

Another White AP social studies teacher shared similar concerns:

> It's pretty obvious who's here because they want to be and who just got stuck in the class. I am straightforward with my kids. I tell them 'I'm here to help you if you want it but you've got to initiate contact.' That's how you weed out the ones who really want it. I prefer students come to me because that shows me they're taking an interest in their education. (3-12-07)

This same teacher also said that his offer for extra help was available to all students, "and any student in my class today is allowed to [come in for extra help]. I don't differentiate based on ability or talent, or race or ethnicity."

White AP teachers at South Gate were frustrated by the high numbers of what they perceived as under-prepared and unmotivated students in their AP classes. They never described these students by race, but rather by ability. However, when asked to identify on their rosters which students they would classify as under-prepared and unmotivated, approximately 90% of the time these White teachers identified Black students. According to White AP teachers in this study, in addition to placement issues, another contributing factor to the AP gap at South Gate is students' unwillingness to work hard. Some of this they attributed to the under-preparation of students for the rigors of AP classes. White AP teachers shared a common belief that they were expected to "turn water into wine"; raise achievement for students who are ill-prepared for AP and unwilling to put forth the effort to succeed. According to one AP science teacher Mr. Terrence:

> I feel like at [South Gate] we have a lot of catch-up. A lot of our students come to

us fourteen years without knowing. It's frustrating. And then, a lot of them don't

care about their grades. They want to do the minimal amount of work they can get

away with. There's no ambition to excel. They just don't want to work! (3-27-07)

These beliefs that students were not working hard enough or cared about doing well

academically were prevalent among White AP teachers at South Gate. As discussed

earlier, these perceptions were similarly held by their White colleagues at Robinson High.

These perceptions by White teachers at both schools were also part of the dominant

narrative regarding the achievement gap between students of color and their White and

Asian peers.

Similar to their colleagues at Robinson High, White AP teachers at South Gate

believed that students needed to take more responsibility for their learning and

demonstrate more initiative in seeking help from teachers. The school was structured

around a 50-minute lunch period. Half of that time was designed to be used by teachers

for Instructional Resource Activities. Teachers were expected to work with students

during this designated instructional resource time. According to the White AP teachers in

this study, Black AP students were not utilizing this time effectively. Ms. Strausberg

talked about how she often ate lunch alone because students would not come in for help

during lunch:

The other teachers in my department are always like 'Where have you been? We

never see you?' And it's because I end up eating lunch in my room waiting for

students to show up. I usually end up eating alone because they never come. They

know I'm always here for them and I tell them to come in if they're having

trouble but they never do. It's like they just don't care. (3-16-07)

Mr. Terrence also believed that the Brown Bags were a waste of time because students typically did not come in for help:

> Everyone knows that this is how it works here. The administration has made it clear to us (teachers) that we are supposed to be in our rooms and available to students during the lunch Instructional Resource Activity. They have made it clear (to students) that they should be using that time to get help. I tell my students, 'Hey, I'm here.' But they don't come in. They'd rather hang out with their friends. And I shouldn't have to run around the school rounding them up like cattle! As AP students they need to take more initiative and have as sense of responsibility. (3-27-07)

White AP teachers at South Gate believed that AP students had a responsibility to seek the help they needed. They interpreted the lack of student initiative to seek additional academic support as a sign that students did not care.

In addition to placement issues and students' lack of effort, White AP teachers at South Gate also spoke extensively about the role of parental involvement in explaining the AP gap. According to an AP art teacher, "We have a lack of support in a lot of the parents at [South Gate], and I think that's one of the reasons why we're so low-achieving as well" (3-23-07). White AP teachers suggested that the lack of parental involvement among their Black AP students was likely a factor of the socio-economic nature of the community, "So the parents aren't there as much because sometimes they're working multiple jobs. So I think that is the biggest, the economics of the area. I mean, [Jones Mill] is not inexpensive to live in!" (3-23-07).

One AP social studies teacher talked about his own upper-middle class

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background and how it shaped his schooling experiences. He also compared his experiences to those of Black students at South Gate:

> My dad's a lawyer, and so my mom didn't really need to work. And so when we were growing up, my mom was home. And so we knew if there was anything that happened at school, we'd hear about it before we got home. And also, it didn't help my mom was PTA president. So it's like we had to behave. And I think in this area it's just a different...it's more dual-income households now…I think if you looked at percentage of parents--the students who had parents who are divorced, single-parent households, divorced, no father, no mother, not living with parents, all those things, I think you'll probably find it's the more the norm for kids here. So there's no one there to check on them at home. And they're probably so busy trying to provide for their families that they can't take an active part in their kids' education. (3-12-07)

These perceptions about Black parents at South Gate were common among the White AP teachers in this study. Ms. Strausberg shared her frustrations trying to develop what she called "relationships" with the parents of her Black AP students:

> I've continually tried calling home... The parents either say something like they're supportive and then don't have any action, and the kid stays the same, or the parents kind of are on the side of their kid saying that, "Whatever my child does is up to him. It's his choice." So…what am I supposed to do with that? Sometimes there just aren't phone numbers, they're disconnected. They don't have resources. They don't have money to pay for AP books. The parents may be working three jobs. They aren't even involved at home in the kids' lives. So they're not going

home and doing their work; they're going home and doing other things not related to school. So there are a lot of barriers with those particular students. (3-16-07)

Unlike their counterparts at Robinson High, White AP teachers at South Gate seldom talked about relationships. Interview data for this study were initially analyzed using inductive codes, one of which was related to relationships. I identified ideas related to teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships under the code "Relationships". Review of data identified under this code illustrated that while the concept of developing relationships with students was common among teachers at Robinson High, there was little talk about relationships among AP teachers at South Gate. This may partially be explained by the fact that one of the staff development initiatives at Robinson High was based on the importance of developing relationships, perhaps contributing to the frequency with which teachers there used this term or the language of relationships in their conversations with me. However, after closer examination and subsequent data analysis of interviews with teachers at South Gate, another theme appeared to be more prevalent: deficit thinking about Black students and their parents.

The deficit perspectives held by White AP teachers at South Gate influenced the development of productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. White AP teachers at South Gate attributed the AP gap to a variety of factors. They viewed school policies aimed at increasing AP enrollment of Black students as counter-productive, contributing to increased numbers of students in their classes who they believed were under-prepared and not motivated. They also believed that among the ones who were "capable" of doing well in rigorous courses, they chose not to work hard and cared little about academic achievement. Additionally, they had deficit perspectives of Black

parents. They believed that those parents, likely a result of socio-economic conditions, were not taking an active role in their child's education. Of the six AP teachers at South Gate who participated in this study, only one did not demonstrate any deficit perspectives towards Black students or their parents. That AP teacher also happened to be the only Black AP teacher at South Gate.

N of One: Kendra Winston Represents a Black AP Teachers' Perspective

There was only one Black AP teacher at South Gate, Kendra Winston. In Chapter five I introduced Ms. Winston and her perspectives of the accountability culture at South Gate. In that section I also talked to some extent about her perceptions of her White AP colleagues.

Ms. Winston had been teaching AP Statistics and AP Calculus at South Gate for eight years and had been teaching at the school longer than any other AP teacher in this study. Like Ms. East and Mr. Michaels, the only Black AP teachers at Robinson High, she too was concerned with the under-representation and under-achievement of Black students in AP classes. She talked extensively about what she called "troubling race relations" at South Gate, rooted in what she believed to be a break-down in communication between White AP teachers and Black students. She recalled a time when she was one of many Black AP teachers at South Gate and believed that that had something to do with the representation of Black students in AP:

> When I first started teaching here, I think one of the subtle things is that when half
> of your AP teachers in the building look like you, you're more apt to go ahead
> and sign up for those courses. I've seen that decline. I am the only one. But when
> I first started, six of us were Black. And we had very strong personalities. And it's

not just race per se, it's about the relationships we develop with our children, and

maybe part of that is made easier because we are Black. (3-28-07)

Ms. Winston pointed out to me that she had the largest number of Black students in her

AP Statistics and AP Calculus classes in the school district. She attributed that to her

belief that students identified with her, partially because she was Black and partially

because of her involvement with Black students outside of the classroom:

When people ask me what I do around here, it never occurs to me to say I'm a

math teacher because I do everything around here! And when I say everything, I

mean from volleyball coach--I used to coach field hockey. I'm the drama director.

I'm the yearbook advisor. I have a group here, 'Women Aiming Towards

Excellence'. So it's like I see these kids constantly, and they're cool with me

outside of class. And so then they want to be in my class. And then the only way

you're going to be in my class is if you take AP cause that's what I teach. So I

know for a fact I've gotten a lot of kids who just signed up for AP to be in my

class. (3-28-07)

According to Ms. Winston, developing relationships with students, particularly

Black students, is critical in addressing the AP gap. She suggested that Black student

under-representation in rigorous high school courses, including AP, can be attributed to

the lack of diversity among teachers of those classes, believing that Black students tend

to identify and engage with teachers based on race. However, she also believed that

strong student-teacher relationships can cross racial lines; that it is possible for White

teachers to relate to Black students and that Black students at South Gate are willing to

develop relationships with White teachers. The issue at South Gate according to Ms.

Winston, as explored in Chapter five, is that she believed White AP teachers were not interested in developing relationships with students who are racially and socio-economically different from them:

> Maybe if you're a White person who grew up with every privilege in life, you might have to work a little bit harder to get other people, not even just Black kids, to relate to you. If not the result is kids feeling like, 'I don't get you, and I'm not trying to get your subject either,' you know, because they're looking for any reason why not to get something. (3-28-07)

Ms. Winston suggested that the AP gap at South Gate may partly be attributed to her White colleagues' unwillingness to *see* race. She talked about the hypocrisy of her colleagues who claimed they "see no color" but still engaged with students in different ways based on race. As quoted in Chapter five, she shared her observation that school rules are enforced by White teachers differently for Black students and White students. In her assessment, White teachers were afraid to hold Black students accountable in the halls and in their classrooms and this "sends messages to our Black students that White teachers don't care about them" (3-28-07). Ms. Winston believed that her White colleagues had bought into prevailing stereotypes of Black children and were unwilling to confront them. She suggested this was an obstacle in the development of productive relationships between White AP teachers and Black students at South Gate.

Black Students' and Parents' Perceptions of AP Teachers

Unlike Black students and parents at Robinson High, the Black AP students and parent participants at South Gate believed that White AP teachers treated them differently based on race. They believed that teachers not only had low expectations of Black

students, but that they also had little regard or respect for Black parents. These perceptions were based on their interactions with AP teachers at South Gate.

Black Students: Dynamic Not Deficient

Far from exhibiting "deficits", Black AP student participants at South Gate were academically, socially and culturally active. All of the students were in one of two SLCs: International Scholars (IS) SLC or the Community Leaders Program (CLP). As mentioned in Chapter four, of the four small learning communities at the school, these two were perceived as more "academically rigorous". Of the eleven student participants, five were taking one AP class at the time of this study, four were taking two, one was taking three and one extraordinary junior was taking five. These students also had GPAs ranging from 2.8 to 3.8. All of the students were involved in a wide array of extracurricular activities at the school including athletic teams, social clubs, and the student government association. Many of them also were involved in volunteer activities outside of school through their churches and other civic organizations. All of these students had aspirations to attend college after high school and recognized the importance of taking AP classes to meet those goals. Unfortunately, like their peers at Robinson High, they also had negative stories to share about their interactions and relationships with White AP teachers at South Gate.

Data collection for this study happened concurrently; each week I was at both schools conducting observations and interviews with participants. My first student interviews, however, were done at Robinson High. The student interview protocol I initially used was designed to explore, among other things, student perceptions of AP classes and teachers. After early analysis of student interviews at Robinson High revealed

that students frequently employed a "good" teacher/ "bad" teacher dichotomy in talking about their experiences in AP classes, I looked for a similar theme among the student interviews from South Gate. Unlike their peers at Robinson High, students at South Gate did not talk about their teachers by using these labels. Instead they referenced race extensively and explicitly when they talked about their experiences in their AP classes and their relationships with those teachers.

Students were conscious of the fact that all of their AP teachers were White and that there was only one Black AP teacher in the building. Even though only three students had either taken or were taking an AP class with Ms. Winston, all of them knew her personally and talked about having relationships with her through their involvement in activities she sponsored at the school: yearbook club, school plays, and social clubs. Among those who had not taken a class with her, many were planning to take one of her AP classes the following school year. Abiye, a sophomore, was one such student.

Abiye was in the CLP and at the time had taken AP classes through the social studies department. He talked about how much he really enjoyed history and did not enjoy his math classes. Despite that, he really wanted to take AP Statistics with Ms. Winston. When I asked him why, he responded:

> I'm on the yearbook committee and [Ms. Winston] is our sponsor. She is definitely the greatest teacher at [South Gate]. She doesn't treat us like we're inferior or stupid. I know a lot of people in her classes and they are always in her room at lunch. They said she's really good at explaining stuff and that it's not that hard because she makes it easy to understand. I never really was good at math because I never had teachers who could really teach it to me. She told me I should

take her class and that if I did she would help me get it. She even said she could

make me actually like math! She's just mad cool! (5-9-07)

According to Rachel, a senior who had taken four AP classes taught by White teachers at

South Gate and who was at the time taking AP Calculus with Ms. Winston, the reason a

lot of Black students at South Gate take AP Statistics or Calculus was because of Ms.

Winston:

I don't know if you know but [Ms. Winston] is the only Black AP teacher here.

I've been here for four years and never had a Black AP teacher until this year, my

SENIOR year. And she is the best AP teacher I've ever had. She gets us—like,

she just understands us. I don't really know how to explain it but I feel like the

White AP teachers here look down on us. Like because we're Black we can't do

the work. [Ms. Winston] never puts us down or makes you feel bad when you ask

a question in class. Some of these other teachers make you feel stupid and then

you just don't want to say anything anymore. (5-11-07)

Although, when asked, many students had a difficult time articulating specifically what it

was about Ms. Winston they related to or liked, most of the students talked about Ms.

Winston as Rachel does: "She gets us". And they believed this was because she was

Black. Clarence, a senior who was at the time taking AP Statistics and an AP English

class, also believed he and other Black students had better relationships with Ms.

Winston than their other AP teachers "because she's Black" (5-9-07). When I asked him,

"What about her being Black makes your relationship with her better?" he responded:

We have so much in common with [Ms. Winston], more than the White teachers

here. They just don't understand us. They don't listen to the music we do, they

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don't get some of our ways---like we can joke with her, I don't know really know

how to explain it but she can relate to us. The White teachers here just don't

relate.

Most of the students, like Rachel and Clarence, talked about Ms. Winston's race as being

one of the reasons they identified with her more than their other teachers.

I analyzed student interviews to try to understand what it was about Ms.

Winston's race that influenced her relationships with Black students. Based on the data,

one theme that emerged was cultural congruence. Students, like Rachel and Clarence,

believed that Ms. Winston, unlike their White AP teachers, understood them culturally.

Students believed they could relate to her because she identified with aspects of their

culture; she used the same euphemisms in her speech as they did, listened to the same

type of music they did, ate the same types of foods they did, and in general, related to

their experiences. Rather than race, it was likely that students' identified more with Ms.

Winston than their White AP teachers because of these perceived cultural connections.

In addition to Black AP students' perception that race, or perhaps more so culture,

mattered when it came to developing productive relationships with their teachers, similar

to their peers at Robinson High, students at South Gate also talked about the importance

of particular teacher behaviors: showing care, being supportive, and giving

encouragement. These were behaviors students had experienced in their interactions with

Ms. Winston; behaviors they seldom experienced with White AP teachers at South Gate.

Most students believed that their White AP teachers did not care about them,

believed they had low expectations for their achievement and were not willing to give

them extra help or support when they were struggling. Although they did not use the

term, these students described deficit-type attitudes and behaviors from their White AP teachers towards them. Rachel shared numerous stories about her experiences with White AP teachers that she considered "blatantly racist" at South Gate. The following incident happened during her junior year:

> I always wanted to be a doctor…and I always had to work really hard in my math and science classes, but it was what I really wanted to do….I was on this special track of science classes since middle school so I could take AP Chem junior year. I ended up doing really bad first semester and my AP Chem teacher was not encouraging. He was like--like when I was trying to come in for extra help and everything, he was like, 'Well, you know, [Rachel], some people are meant to be doctors and some people aren't. Science isn't for everybody.' He told me I should drop the class before I messed up my GPA. He basically didn't want to help ME and I know it's because he's a racist because when I would walk by his room at lunch he'd be in there working with White kids from my class. That broke my heart because I really love science even though I suck at it. Like I wanted to take science all four years, but I took a break in eleventh grade because of him. So I got out of AP Chem. And I would have taken regular chem, but it wouldn't fit in my schedule. So that's why I took child development. (5-11-07)

The data do not confirm whether Rachel's AP Chemistry teacher was actually racist and treated her this way because of her race. But she interpreted it that way. More importantly, she did not feel supported or encouraged by this White AP teacher. Rachel's interactions with this White AP teacher did not contribute to the development of a productive student-teacher relationship and actually inhibited her academic success and

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growth when she dropped the class.

Many other students in this study talked about dropping out of and not taking AP classes at South Gate because of the reputation of White AP teachers: that they were racist, non- supportive, and did not care about Black students. Similar to students at Robinson High, Black AP students in this study talked about the importance of information sharing among their peers in their decisions to take AP classes. The most important information was typically about the teachers. According to Janet, a sophomore who was a class officer in the student government association at South Gate:

> When I was trying to figure out what I was going to take next year I talked to a lot of my friends who are juniors and seniors. I definitely want to go to college and be a lawyer. I know I need to take AP classes because colleges look for those kinds of classes in your transcript. Plus, I just want to take challenging classes because that's the kind of person I am. But people told me about [AP English teacher] and [AP Social Studies teacher] and I decided against taking those two. I mean, AP classes are really hard—they're college level. I'm the kind of person that can handle challenges, but I need to know that if I need help the teachers got my back and will be there for me. This year was really hard and I'm only a sophomore. From what I heard about [AP English teacher] and [AP Social Studies teacher], I'm not the right color to take their classes and, if I do, I'll be pretty much on my own. (5-11-07)

Janet ended up registering for honors classes in English and Social Studies the following year; one was being taught by a White teacher and the other by a Black teacher.

Despite these experiences, students in this study were taking AP classes. They

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also talked extensively about the struggles they faced. Rachel was taking her first AP class and talked about the challenges. I asked her to tell me about her experiences and any support she was receiving:

> Mostly my friends. We have a study group and we meet every Saturday morning, usually at somebody's house… My mom is also really supportive. She's a lawyer and she knows all this stuff so she helps me when I don't understand things. We usually end up at my house a lot because my friends think she's a better teacher than [our AP teacher]. [Our AP teacher] always tells us to come in during lunch if we need help but she's never there or if she is she's on the phone or with a group of White kids and tells us to wait until she's done. By the time she's done, lunch is over and we have to go to class. So she's pretty useless. (5-11-07)

Clarence also talked about his AP teachers not being supportive or available for extra help during lunch or after school and relying on a help from a tutor his parents hired:

> This year I'm taking two AP classes: Stats and English Lit. [Ms. Winston] is great! She's always there when I need her. She even did review sessions for the exam on Saturdays the last few weeks. But my other AP teacher has never been around this year. I've been able to handle it for the most part…I meet with people in the class at lunch in a study group usually…but it's been really hard. I almost dropped the class last semester but my parents got me a tutor from [a local University] and she's was really helpful. She is like a English major or something and knows all this stuff. [My tutor] is the only reason I stayed and passed the class. (5-9-07)

Clarence considered dropping his AP English class when he was unable to get the extra

support he needed from his teacher. But with the help of a tutor his parents retained for him, he stayed in the class and took the AP exam.

Black AP students at South Gate had similar experiences to their peers at Robinson High. Students at both schools did not believe their White AP teachers had high expectations for their academic performance. They also did not feel supported by those teachers. The difference for students at Robinson High was that they had the Minority Honors Society (MHS), an organization within the school that provided them with support. MHS students supported each other in the absence of teacher support. Additionally, the coordinators of the program, who were also Black AP teachers, developed productive teacher-student relationships with most of the students in the organization, demonstrating care for these students and providing them with the encouragement and support they wanted and needed. Students at South Gate did not have anything comparable to the MHS. Instead, Black AP students looked for support from their peers, their parents, and private tutors.

Even though students at South Gate spoke frequently about the race of their AP teachers and believed that race was a factor in their interactions with them, students also inferenced characteristics of "good" and "bad" teachers identified by Robinson High students. Students typically described Ms. Winston, the only Black AP teacher at South Gate, using the "good" teacher criteria of Robinson High students. They typically described all the others, all White, using the "bad" teacher criteria. As a result, Black AP students were not likely to develop productive relationships with their White AP teachers. Although this did not prevent most students in this study from taking AP classes or from working hard to do well, it was likely that these perceptions among Black students in

general influenced the AP gap at South Gate.

Black Parents: "It Takes the Home and the School to Bring Up a Child"

The parents of the Black AP students in this study had a lot in common. Despite the perception among many White AP teachers that their students' parents were too busy working to take an interest in their child's education, these parents valued education and were very interested in their child's academic achievement. The parents in this study were familiar with and utilized the school's on-line grade book system to monitor their child's grades. Some of them had retained tutors for their children at their own expense. These parents were also engaged in "White collar" employment, including professions in education, law, medicine, marketing, and with the federal government. All were college educated and most held graduate degrees. Four of the parents were educated abroad in European and African nations and spoke two or more languages. These parents also had high expectations of their children; earning college degrees was not an option for their children, it was demanded. They also shared a belief that White AP teachers at South Gate did not have high expectations of their children and as a result did not encourage or support their academic achievement. Similar to the perceptions of the students, these Black parents believed that race was a factor in teacher attitudes towards their children and towards them.

One of the mothers, Ms. Spencer, had two children attending South Gate and her daughter Corinne, a junior taking five AP classes, was one of the student participants. Ms. Spencer had been actively involved in the schools her children attended as a parent volunteer. At the time of this study, she was also serving on the South Gate Cluster Committee. She described her role and the role of the committee in this way:

There are three of us for the [district] cluster. The cluster includes [South Gate] and all the elementary and middle schools that feed into it… and our job is to represent the parents' point of view, and we meet monthly with the [Jones Mill School District] PTA. So all the schools get together and meet, and we meet as a cluster and talk about issues in the [district], and we testify before the Board of Education on issues of the budget with regard to capital improvement. So we fight for improving the schools…(5-11-07)

Ms. Spencer was actively involved in the school system. She believed it was important for her to advocate not only for her own children but for children of color in general because many of them did not have anyone advocating for them. In her experiences working in schools she noticed that students of color were typically under-represented in rigorous academic tracks. She attributed this to a lack of interest or high expectations on the part of White school personnel for the achievement of these students. She shared her perceptions of the experiences of students of color in gifted and talented/ honors tracks that she developed as a result of her work in schools and with her daughter Corinne:

I've worked in the school system with kids before, and I've seen smart children who people don't acknowledge, some that I've gone to bat for to get them into the courses where they're properly challenged. So I've had my nose in it for a while…Well, all parents can't be involved in schools so, for the kids whose parents couldn't be involved, I've been involved for them as well, because nobody else is really doing it. And I've been a pest for some teachers, but I know that teachers appreciate when they see parents, even the parents that get on their nerves;--they'd rather see those parents of those kids than not see anybody at all.

And some of the children's parents can't come. And some people don't

understand it or don't bother to talk to the families and find out why that is. So

those kids are left behind, especially students of color, the smart ones and the ones

who need more help. (5-11-07)

Ms. Spencer talked about the relationship between parent involvement and

student placement or participation in rigorous academic tracks. She believed the issue at

South Gate was that AP teachers, who she observed were typically White, had low

expectations and were not supportive of Black students. According to Ms. Spencer, these

attitudes were based on race. Ms. Spencer grew up in the district and attended high

school there in the late 60s. Having direct experiences with racism, both in schools and in

the community, she was conscious of issues of race. She talked about issues of race as

she recalled an incident Corinne had with one of her AP teachers:

And I know a lot of the students who go to [South Gate] because they live in this

neighborhood, and they were all on swim team together…And [Corinne] came

back telling me, 'Mr. So-and-so seems racist, and he favors the White kids,' and

duh, duh, duh. And I'm thinking, 'Well, what behaviors--you know, what is it

exactly that lets you think that?' And she would tell me, you know, 'Well he yells

at this black kid and then doesn't say anything to the White kids. He doesn't yell

at them.' She has a friend that's a White girl who purposefully did things to him

to see what he would do, and he did not react to her. (5-11-07)

Ms. Spencer and her husband met with the principal as a result of her daughters

experiences with this White AP teacher. Although no action was taken against the

teacher, Ms. Spencer believed it was important for her to voice her concerns on behalf of

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her daughter and other children of color:

> I made it clear to [the principal] that, "Maybe you don't realize that, but when White teachers do this, this, this and this, the message to all the children, colored or not, is that you favor children who are White. (5-11-07)

Ms. Spencer shared other stories about her interactions with Corinne's White AP teachers, as well as stories she had heard from other Black parents of AP students at South Gate. These experiences and stories contributed to Ms. Spencer's beliefs that White AP teachers at South Gate did not have high expectations for Black students and did not support them in the same ways they did White students.

Another issue for Black parents was the lack of communication on the part of White AP teachers. Ms. Marks, Clarence's mother, talked about her experiences with the school system as she "navigated his educational process" to get him into rigorous academic tracks at an early age. She made the decision to give up her law practice when Clarence was in middle school because, as she put it, "holding these White teachers accountable for supporting my son became a full-time job" (5-15-07). Ms. Marks also believed that race was a contributing factor to her experiences and the experiences of other Black parents in the system. Like Ms. Spencer, she became actively involved in the schools as a volunteer and created a Parent Advocacy Group for Black parents at South Gate when Clarence started high school. She started the group because she wanted to help other Black parents "navigate" the system for their children. According to Ms. Marks:

> You see, Black parents need to realize real quick that these White AP teachers really don' think much about our kids and if they have it their way, they wouldn't

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even be in the classes. But with the push in the school system to increase minority

enrollment in AP classes, more and more of our kids are in their classes. But they

still think [our kids] are not smart enough to be there and that they can't achieve.

They don't want to support them. So we have to be vocal. We have to be crazy

mommas and let them know that we are watching them and they WILL do their

job and support our kids. (5-15-07)

Ms. Marks shared one of her experiences when she said she had to act like a "crazy

momma" in order to get one of Clarence's AP teachers to respond to her concerns about

his progress:

And I think I must've emailed her (Clarence's White AP teacher) about three

times over the course of a week after interims came out and she did not respond.

Not even to acknowledge she had received the emails. I mean, I appreciate how

busy things can get for them, especially right after interims come out, with all the

parents probably trying to arrange meetings with them and talk to them about

their children. But to be ignored after three emails, probably a few phone

messages, is ridiculous! She was definitely messing with the wrong momma! So I

had to go up there and act like a crazy momma in the office. Do you see why I

had to quit working? It took me going up in there and getting in the principal's

face to get that woman to respond. And I know he (the principal) did not

appreciate the spectacle I made that day. (5-15-07)

Ms. Marks contrasted this experience with a White AP teacher to her interactions with

Ms. Winston, Clarence's Black AP teacher:

But when [Clarence] took [Ms. Winston's] AP class, I actually got a break. It was

like a vacation. And I know the principal and secretaries in the office were happy

not to have to see me that year! She was always responsive to my concerns,

usually emailing me or calling me back with 24 hours of any contact I tried to

make. And talk about supportive! She used to go to the kid's houses on Saturdays

to review with them before the AP exams. She came here once for that. I don't

think any of the other AP teachers would ever do that, not even for their White

kids. (5-15-07)

Most of the Black parents in this study experienced similar communication issues with

their child's White AP teachers.

Despite the perceptions of White AP teachers in this study that Black parents

were too busy working to monitor their child's progress or support them academically,

Black parents at South Gate were actually very active, as the experiences of Ms. Spencer

and Ms. Marks demonstrate. All of the Black parents talked about the struggles they

faced trying to communicate with White AP teachers about their child's progress. The

perception among Black parents was that White AP teachers were not supporting their

children. They believed that these teachers were not interested in developing productive

relationships with them or their children.

Both Ms. Spencer and Ms. Marks suggested that Black parent "invisibility"

contributed to teachers' low expectations toward their children and to the communication

issues they faced. They shared the belief that there was a connection between their

visibility in the school and White teacher responsiveness to them. Annette Lareau's

(2000) research on teacher-parent relationships suggests the same: that teachers want

parents to be involved. Lareau, drawing on national surveys of teachers, found that what

teachers wanted from parents was a partnership; they "do not want parents to turn over to them the whole responsibility for educating the child" (Laureau, 2000, p. 15). But for the Black parents in this study, the issue was that White AP teachers seemed unwilling to engage in partnerships with them. According to Abiye's mother:

It takes the home and the school to bring up a child. And for me, I've always been involved with my kids. And I believe the school has its job and the parent has to do their job. I really believe that it takes two. Now, when I say "involved," I don't mean going to every single thing the school does. You know, communicate with your child. If there's an issue, go to the school and meet up with the teacher. The problem is when teachers don't communicate with parents. There have been many times when I have emailed and even called [Abiye's] AP teachers about his progress and they have not responded. It took a visit to the principal to make them accountable. (5-13-07)

For Abiye's mother, "involvement" did not necessarily include being visible at the school. Her perception of being an involved parent, like most of the Black parents at South Gate, included monitoring her son's academic progress, supporting him at home, and contacting his teachers when she had a concern. The issue for her was that Abiye's White AP teachers were not holding up their end of the "partnership".

Mr. Jacques, Sebastian's father, believed that communication issues with White AP teachers was "purely based on race" (5-16-07). When asked to talk about the basis for his assertion, he responded:

Look, I'm a rational and intelligent person. I've lived in this country long enough to know that race matters-- it affects the treatment you get in stores, your access to

resources in this country. When I read in the news about achievement gaps in schools and all the other racial disparities in this society it doesn't surprise me when I can't get a simple response from his White teachers. They don't even have to call, just email me back! Technology makes it so easy for us to communicate in this society that there is nor reason for it! I shouldn't have to take a day off of work to physically go up to the school to get a response from any teacher. But these teachers make it difficult for us and for our kids to do well. I'm sure that when White parents email them they reply in the wink of an eye. They think if they ignore us we'll go away. It's like we don't matter. (5-16-07)

Mr. Jacques' beliefs about the role race plays in the development of productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships were shared by the other Black parents, as evidenced by analysis of interview data. When parents talked about experiences communicating with teachers, these statements were coded "Communication with Teachers". When they talked about racial issues, racism or racial bias, these statements were coded "Race Bias". An analysis of data double-coded both "Communication with Teachers" and "Race Bias" turned up interview data for all parents in this study. Each parent believed that White AP teachers were racially biased in their interactions with Black students and parents. Some, like Mr. Jacques, believed so more vehemently than others.

What was interesting was that none of the parents talked about class bias as a possible contributing factor in their interactions with White AP teachers at South Gate. Given the prevalence in the research literature, particularly by Rothstein (2004) and Lareau (2000) about the significance of social class in understanding relationships

between schools, children and parents, the Black parents perceived racial bias to be the most important factor. These parents believed that White AP teachers at South Gate did not have high expectations of Black children and were not interested in supporting them academically and suggested that it was because White AP teachers were racially biased.

Summary

Despite the demographic and cultural differences of Jackie Robinson High School and South Gate High School, they had much in common with regards to issues that contribute to the AP gaps between Black and White students. Both schools have gaps in participation and achievement in AP classes among Black and White students. At both schools, White AP teachers believed they treated all students equally and did not hold different attitudes towards students or their parents based on race. White AP teachers believed that students did not take AP classes because they did not want to do the extra work required of them. Additionally, they believed that among students who took these classes, those who did not do well were not working hard enough. White AP teachers at South Gate also believed that the AP gap may be attributed to socio-economic issues in their community which in turn contributed to the lack of parent-involvement in students' academic lives. These beliefs and attitudes influenced the development of productive teacher-student relationships and teacher-parent relationships at both schools for Black students and their parents. At both schools, White AP teachers did not typically develop these relationships, at least not in ways that Black students and parents thought were productive toward increasing achievement.

At both Robinson and South Gate there were few Black AP teachers. These teachers were more likely to develop productive teacher-student and teacher-parent

relationships with Black students and their parents. Black AP teachers suggested that this may be attributed to their shared racial identities with students and parents and shared social experiences. They were conscious of race and believed that the AP gap was connected to racial difference. They believed their White colleagues treated Black students differently and did not support them in equitable ways. According to Ms. East, "Equity means giving more to students who need it" (3-23-07).

They also attributed these productive relationships to deliberate actions and behaviors. The three Black AP teachers at these two schools were involved in students' lives outside of the classroom. At Robinson High, Ms. East and Mr. Michaels worked extensively and on personal levels with Black students and their parents as coordinators of the Minority Honors Society. At South Gate, Ms. Winston sponsored many clubs and social organizations that provided her with opportunities to connect on personal levels with Black students. All three suggested that their "color-blind" White colleagues did not actively engage with Black students outside of the classroom to support their achievement and that this influenced the development of relationships with students.

The issue of care was also prevalent at both schools. Black students and parents did not believe that White AP teachers cared about them. Black students and parents at both schools measured teacher care in terms of encouragement and support. For students, their perception that White AP teachers treated them differently in classes and were not available for extra help during and after school contributed to their beliefs that these teachers did not care about them. For parents, their struggles in communicating with White AP teachers about their children's progress in classes and the experiences their children shared with them about interactions in school contributed to their beliefs that

these teachers not only did not care about their children but were not interested in supporting their children because of their race.

The research literature supports the idea that productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships are important for supporting student achievement, particularly for Black and Latino students. Addressing the Black-White AP gap at Robinson High and South Gate requires AP teachers, who are predominantly White, to work in deliberate ways to develop these relationships with the Black students. In the next and final chapter I summarize comparisons and major themes that emerged from the data relative to the research questions that guided this study as well as discuss implications of my findings for school districts and schools committed to addressing the Black-White AP gap and creating equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Chapter 7: Comparisons of Schools and Implications for Schools & School Districts

This study explored what two schools in a large, diverse, suburban school district were doing to increase participation and achievement of Black students in rigorous high school courses like AP. Administrators at both schools implemented programs and policies aimed at these goals. At Robinson High, Dr. Ragan created the Minority Honors Society and focused the staff development agenda on diversity training and awareness. His approach was designed to address the AP gap at Robinson by creating a support group for Black AP students and working with staff to develop their capacities for culturally relevant relationship building with students. To address the AP gap at South Gate, Mr. Jackson put an instructional resource activity for teachers in place called Brown Bags. This program was meant to encourage teachers to work with students and provide extra support during the school day. Mr. Jackson also implemented a protocol at South Gate for dropping AP classes. The protocol was designed to bring together a team of adults in students' lives, including their AP teacher, school counselor, school administrator and parents, in the decision-making process for opting out of AP classes once registered. The goal was to create an intervention that might draw attention to the need for additional support for an AP student and prevent them from dropping these classes. However, analysis of the perceptions of school personnel, Black students, and their parents demonstrate that programs and policies for addressing the AP gap are not effective unless caring teachers believe in and reach out to Black students.

This chapter further summarizes the main findings from this study. The next section is a comparative analysis of the major themes that emerged from the data in relation to the research questions and the conceptual framework. The subsequent section

considers the implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice in schools and school districts.

Addressing Research Questions and the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study (Appendix B) comprised four theoretical perspectives that have been employed to understand the Black-White AP gap. Ideally, schools that work to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP courses would create programs and policies to achieve these goals, as was the case at Robinson and South Gate. However, there was little evidence that AP teachers in these schools engaged in culturally relevant practices that supported teacher-student relationships based on care, had high expectations, and provided structured academic support for Black students. Additionally, there was little evidence that AP teachers worked collaboratively with other school personnel and with students' parents in productive school-family relationships to support the participation and achievement of Black students in AP classes.

According to critical and sociological perspectives, socioeconomic and racial inequalities in society are often reproduced in schools and are perpetuated by teachers and other school personnel. This, in part, is seen in deficit-based thinking in educators' interactions with students. Black students in the schools under investigation are often subjects of deficit-based thinking by White AP teachers. This deficit-based thinking manifested itself in teachers' low expectations of Black students. One way students in general respond to low expectations is to resist or oppose schooling. However, the Black students in this study did not "resist" participation in AP classes. Peer and parent support influenced their decisions to take these classes in the face of teacher low expectations.

Additionally, Black AP teachers were also influential in Black students' decisions to take AP classes. Students took AP classes taught by Black teachers because they felt supported by them and believed that those teachers cared about their well-being. Black AP teachers at both schools demonstrated the establishment of productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships; something that was typically absent among White AP teachers.

Although acknowledging the importance of the broader educational policy context, specifically NCLB, on school-level initiatives and practices, this study focused primarily on school-level factors, including the strategies used by schools to address the AP gap and the perceptions of school personnel, Black students and their parents about those strategies. But data analysis indicated that I underestimated the influence of school district policies on what was happening at both Robinson and South Gate in relation to increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. The conceptual framework that initially guided this study centered on school-level factors and did not consider the potency of the school district context within which school-level reform occurs. Considering the influence of school-district policies on school-level programs, policies, and practice adds another dimension to my conceptual framework for understanding the AP gap at Robinson and South Gate (Appendix C & D). It is evident from the data that school-level programs, policies and practices are influenced by district-level imperatives. This is not to suggest that schools do not have some degree of autonomy over school-level reforms, but rather to acknowledge that school district accountability pressures influence the way schools address the AP gap. Therefore, it is

important to revisit and modify the original conceptual framework to reflect this difference in influence.

Comparisons of Robinson and South Gate: Analyzing Major Themes

Comparative analysis of the data collected for this study demonstrates three main themes relevant to the research questions. These themes are not mutually exclusive but rather intersect and influence one another. The first theme is the influence of school district accountability pressures on school cultures and school-level programs, policies and practices for addressing the AP gap. As these data demonstrate, despite the informal freedom schools may have to implement programs and policies and to engage in practices to address the AP gap, school-level reforms and school cultures are influenced by accountability pressures from the school district. The second theme is the relationship between school policies and practices and perception issues among school personnel, Black students and their parents. Central to this theme is the reluctance of White AP teachers and staff to discuss race. School policies and practices are influenced by perceptions among teachers, students and parents about the salience of race in relation to addressing the Black-White AP gap and these perceptions, in turn, influence school policies and practices. The third theme centers on the development of collaborative cultures and productive relationships among and between school personnel, students and parents for increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. The development of collaborative cultures and productive relationships are also influenced by school cultures and perceptions of the salience of race.

Accountability Pressures, School Cultures & School-Level Reforms

Accountability pressures from the Jones Mill School District focused on increasing achievement for all students in its schools, particularly among Black students who were typically under-achieving as compared to White students. However, those pressures were articulated in different ways at Robinson and South Gate and resulted in different types of school-level reforms (Appendix B & C). At Robinson, a school characterized by a culture of achievement, district imperatives for achievement were relatively weak and focused on increasing the participation and achievement of Black students in rigorous high school curriculum as exemplified by AP courses. At South Gate, a school characterized by a culture of accountability, district imperatives were less focused on addressing the Black-White AP gap and more on increasing student achievement on minimum proficiency markers like state assessment tests and graduation rates. School district expectations were based on student achievement levels at each school and influenced school cultures and school-level reforms for addressing the AP gap.

The culture of achievement at Robinson influenced the nature of school-level reforms initiated by school administrators. Dr. Ragan, principal of Robinson High, still experienced accountability pressure from the school district. However, because students at Robinson were on average surpassing district passing rates on state standardized tests, thereby meeting AYP goals, "accountability" for Robinson primarily meant addressing the AP gap. Dr. Ragan's pressures were "weak" compared to those experienced by Mr. Jackson at South Gate, where state assessment test scores were lower compared to both Robinson and district averages. As a result, Mr. Jackson experienced more "intense"

pressure to increase achievement on state assessments to meet AYP goals. The pressures he experienced were funneled down to teachers and staff at South Gate and contributed to a culture based on accountability.

To address the AP gap, administrators at both Robinson and South Gate implemented programs, policies and practices aimed at increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. However, differing accountability environments influenced the level of autonomy each administrator experienced to design school-level reforms. Dr. Ragan had more latitude and freedom to craft his school improvement plan to meet district imperatives. This may be partially attributed to "weak" pressures he experienced from the school district. The results, creation of the MHS and a staff development agenda focused on equity and diversity, were developed organically, based on his understandings of the AP gap issues and on the input of staff, students, and their parents. These school-level reforms were aimed at creatng high expectations for student achievement: increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP.

However, Mr. Jackson, principal of the seemingly struggling South Gate where student achievement was relatively low, had less control over the creation and implementation of school level reforms for addressing the Black-White AP gap. School district directives led to the creation of small learning communities at South Gate. These were intended to offer students multiple pathways to high school graduation, with the hope that, if students became engaged in high school curriculum they perceived to be meaningful to their lives and that which also prepared them for possible careers after high school, they would complete high school and graduate. School district pressures to increase participation in AP classes also contributed to Mr. Jackson's administrative

protocol for students who wished to drop AP classes. The goal of the protocol was to include a variety of adults, including the teacher, school counselor, parents and administrator, in students' decision-making process to drop AP classes. The intention was to encourage collaboration among school personnel and students' families to actually *prevent* students from dropping these classes. Unlike Robinson, school-level reforms implemented at South Gate were relatively inorganic in nature: top-down and designed with little local input. Moreover, reforms at South Gate were based on lower expectations for achievement as measured by minimum proficiency markers: passing standardized state assessments. Pressures to make AYP contributed to less attention on reforms for addressing the AP gap, both by the school district and the administration. The exception, and one example of school-level internal freedom, was the implementation of Brown Bags during lunch. This program was designed organically and aimed specifically at supporting student achievement. The implicit goal of this program was to create opportunities for AP teachers to provide additional academic support for Black AP students.

While both Robinson and South Gate had implemented programs to increase Black student participation and achievement in AP courses, none of the programs seemed to have the support of the entire faculty and staff. This created similar obstacles at both schools for addressing the AP gap. At Robinson, Dr. Ragan's "Because I'm Black" panel and subsequent development of the MHS and a staff development agenda for equity and diversity, contributed to the belief among White faculty and staff that addressing the AP gap was the responsibility of Black faculty and staff. The coordinators of the MHS were both Black AP teachers, and the staff development agenda was coordinated and

implemented primarily with input from Black teachers and staff. This proved to be divisive (Appendix C). Instead of creating collaborative cultures governed by productive school-family relationships, the school became divided into two camps. One consisted of those whose responsibility it was to address the Black-White AP gap (Appendix C- right side of diagram). The other consisted primarily of White teachers and staff, who assumed little direct responsibility for Black student achievement, believing that the Black teachers and the MHS were taking care of those students.

At South Gate, the principal, Mr. Jackson, had less latitude to design and implement programs, like the SLCs, aimed at increasing student achievement, particularly the AP gap (see Appendix D). Instead, he funneled accountability pressures he experienced from the district down to his staff. This contributed to the creation of an accountability culture at South Gate, one that led to increased teacher frustration and denial of responsibility. Unlike at Robinson where there was at least one group (the MHS) focused specifically on addressing the Black-White AP gap, none existed at South Gate. Despite the problem at Robinson associated with assigning responsibility to any one group of teachers, responsibility was at least identifiable. At South Gate, it is difficult to discern among the various programs which, if any, attends to the Black-White AP gap (Appendix D).

These issues of ownership, that schools have a responsibility to teach and provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, are inextricably linked to the current policy discourse of accountability. According to Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo (2005), the underlying assumption of increased school-based accountability is that it "will produce greater teacher effort and school attention to performance problems…ultimately enabling

schools to meet proficiency targets" (p. 112). However, in their study of the changing roles of teachers within accountability contexts, Valli & Buese (2007) suggested that increased demands on teachers' time and work contributed to increased teacher stress and may contribute to teacher withdrawal from reform processes, "Unless teachers believe in and help structure new role expectations, they are unlikely to be wholeheartedly involved" (p. 553).

One of the questions that emerged from this study and not initially considered in the conceptual framework, was the influence of accountability pressures on schools attempting to address the Black-White AP gap. Ideally, increased accountability environments should influence schools to increase their attention on student achievement and school-level reforms for supporting students' academic advancement. At South Gate, however, increased pressures on teachers and staff and led to increased teacher frustration and stress. As Valli and Buese (2007) also suggested, this may be attributed to the disproportionate effects of accountability demands on lower performing schools.

Ironically, within the same accountability environment, both Robinson and South Gate seemed to experience a lack of pressure to specifically address the AP gap. At Robinson, the culture of achievement contributed to the perception by school personnel that, on average, students were achieving at high levels. Despite disparities among Black students' participation and achievement in AP classes, the overall achievement picture was positive. This translated into less pressure from the JMSD and from the principal, Dr. Ragan, on teachers and staff to work in deliberate ways to address the AP gap. At South Gate, low achievement among students in general contributed to less pressure on Mr. Jackson from the JMSD to address the AP gap. The accountability culture at South Gate

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focused on meeting AYP goals, which did not include increasing Black student participation and achievement in AP courses. Although addressing the AP gap was an objective in the SIPs of both schools, there did not appear to be a sense of urgency to meet that objective. The irony is that accountability environments, according to Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo (2005), typically have the effect "of creating urgency and the will to improve, with accountability the primary mechanism of instilling these changes" (p. 111). While both schools were situated within an accountability-based policy context, neither was under any intense pressure or scrutiny to address disparities in the Black-White AP gap. This influenced the programs, policies, and practices at each school.

While some of these programs and policies at the two schools were designed explicitly to meet this objective; others were not. At Robinson, the MHS and staff development agenda on equity and diversity were listed in the SIP as programs meant to meet their goal of increasing the participation and supporting the academic achievement of Black students in AP courses. Dr. Ragan, working in collaboration with select teachers and staff at his school, developed and implemented both programs. The MHS was created specifically to support Black students who were taking AP and honors courses, both socially and academically. Dr. Ragan purposively chose two Black AP teachers to coordinate the program. This was partly because these two teachers, Ms. East and Mr. Michaels, had already been actively involved in another Black student organization at the school and as a result had developed relationships with most of the Black students at Robinson. He also believed that they would be good role models and mentors to the Black students in the program. It is not clear from the data whether Dr. Ragan also purposively solicited input from the Black staff at the school in developing and

implementing the MHS and staff development agenda.[7] However, what was clear from these data were the perceptions among White teachers at Robinson that the MHS was: 1) an organization designed to support Black students, and 2) the responsibility of Ms. East and Mr. Michaels as program coordinators. In other words, White teachers believed that since the MHS was designed to address the Black-White AP gap, they were relieved of responsibility in meeting that objective. As a result, when asked to talk about the ways their school was working to increase the participation and achievement of Black students in AP courses, White teachers typically referred to the MHS and the work of Ms. East and Mr. Michaels. The perception among White AP teachers in this study was that the onus for addressing the Black-White AP gap was on this program and its coordinators.

According to Ms. East, one of the coordinators of the MHS, the very existence of the MHS seemed to contribute to the perception among White teachers at Robinson that they did not share in the responsibility of encouraging and supporting Black students in AP classes. She believed that one of the issues at Robinson was getting White teacher "buy-in", not just for the MHS but in all initiatives aimed at supporting the achievement of Black students. The principal Dr. Ragan also talked about the importance of getting teacher "buy-in", both for the MHS and for the staff development initiative centered on equity and diversity. Believing issues of race to be difficult conversations for White teachers to engage in, he employed a back door approach, emphasizing the importance of developing relationships with students. The result was a staff development initiative that did not make explicit, at least to White teachers in this study, the connections between developing relationships with students and promoting equity for Black students. The intended message that developing productive teacher-student relationships with Black

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[7] School counselor Ms. Simpson referred to this group as the "Because I'm Black" panel.

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students was important for supporting their academic success, particularly in AP classes, was not perceived by most White teachers at Robinson. This also contributed to what appeared to be a lack of personal responsibility on the part of White AP teachers for addressing the AP gap. These two programs at Robinson, while intended to mobilize school-level efforts for addressing the AP gap, contributed to a perception by White teachers that responsibility for addressing the AP gap rested with the MHS and its Black coordinators. As a result, while the MHS may have likely contributed to increased participation and achievement among Black students in AP courses, it is unlikely that the staff development agenda had any influence on the AP gap at Robinson.

The achievement culture also contributed to the shifting of accountability among White AP teachers for student achievement on students themselves. In a school where most students excelled academically and a program existed to support Black student achievement, White teachers at Robinson did not seem to have a personal sense of responsibility for working in deliberate or collaborative ways with their Black colleagues, Black students, or their parents to address the AP gap.

Unlike the programs implemented at Robinson, the SLCs at South Gate were less organic in nature; implemented by the school district with little school-level influence and not explicitly aimed at addressing the AP gap. These programs were primarily aimed at meeting AYP goals and increasing graduation rates. Additionally, the SLCs seemed to contribute to the sorting of students into two tracks. One was an academic track that emphasized participation in AP classes and led to college admission. The other, a career-oriented track, did not emphasize AP classes but, instead, focused on vocational training. While students in this track may have been encouraged by school personnel to attend

college after high school, the main focus of these programs was increasing the likelihood that students would pass standardized state assessments and graduate from high school.

Although none of the teacher participants in this study taught in the career path SLCs and none of the student participants were in those SLCs, the perceptions just described were common among them. The implicit message of the structure of the various SLCs at South Gate as perceived by teachers, students, and their parents, was that students in the academic tracks were motivated to achieve academically and were interested in attending college after high school. However, the perception of White AP teachers towards many of the Black students in the two SLC academic tracks was different. That difference may be partly attributed to the culture of accountability that existed at South Gate.

White AP teachers in this study consistently talked about their frustrations with the accountability demands levied on them for increasing student achievement in their AP classes. They believed that they were doing the best they could to support students in these classes and suggested that two factors were primarily responsible for Black students' low achievement: incorrect student placements in AP and administrative policies that prevented them from dropping the classes. White AP teachers believed that many of their students had been incorrectly placed, and were not ready for the rigors of AP or not motivated to work hard. These teachers, frustrated by the demands required of them to support these students, suggested that at issue was an administrative policy that made it difficult for students to drop their classes. This policy had been instituted by the principal to increase Black student participation in AP classes and made it difficult, if not impossible at times, for students to drop AP classes once the semester began. Mr. Jackson

implemented an arduous process for moving students out of rigorous AP classes. His

perception of the under-representation of Black students in AP classes, based on data

from previous years, was that while large numbers of Black students started each year in

AP classes, many dropped out mid-year. He believed that by making it difficult for

students to drop these courses, implementing Brown Bags as an Instructional Resource

Activity assignment for teachers, and holding teachers accountable for demonstrating

their work supporting students, particularly Black AP students, more Black students

would stay in AP classes and achieve. While his policy may have contributed to

maintaining the numbers of Black students in AP classes, it did not necessarily influence

White AP teachers to reflect on or change their practices for supporting Black AP student

achievement.

Similar to the White AP teachers at Robinson, White AP teachers at South Gate

did not appear to have a personal sense of responsibility for addressing the AP gap. This

may in part be attributed to the accountability culture at the school. Ironically, increased

accountability on teachers to demonstrate they were working in deliberate ways to

support the achievement of students also led them to shift accountability. White AP

teachers typically believed they were doing all they could to support student

achievement, particularly among their Black AP students. These teachers typically shifted

accountability for achievement onto administrative policies, Black students, and their

parents.

Perceptions of the Salience of Race Influence Relationships

Another theme that emerged from this study involved perceptions of the salience

of race and the influence of these perceptions on relationships among Black and White

AP teachers, between White AP teachers and students, and between White AP teachers and Black parents. Developing understandings of what schools were doing to increase participation and support achievement of Black students in AP involved exploring perceptions of key informants. For that reason, one of the main questions that guided this study focused on the perceptions of school personnel, Black students, and their parents. The research literature also suggested that the development of collaborative school cultures (Gruenert, 2005; Lee & Ready, 2007) and productive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships (Dance, 2002; Ford, 1998; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) are important in supporting the academic achievement of Black students in rigorous curriculum. Given that this study focused on an exploration of how schools were addressing the AP gap between Black and White students, the issue of race seemed salient. While Black teachers, staff, students and parents typically believed race to be a key factor in the nature of their relationships with White AP teachers, White AP teacher participants at both schools were reluctant to talk about race and typically engaged in "colorblind" discourse.

According to Tarca (2005), colorblindness is the belief, stated or implied through actions, that the ultimate goal in ending racial discrimination is best served by treating individuals as individuals rather than on the basis of skin color. She suggested that the ideology of colorblindness distracts from discourse on inequity and confounds efforts to understand or address it. White AP teachers at both schools believed they were promoting equity by engaging in what they perceived as colorblind pedagogical practices. However, an analysis of those practices demonstrated that White AP teachers, as a product of their

colorblindness, were not working collaboratively with their Black colleagues or Black parents to support Black students in equitable ways.

According to Ebert (2004), colorblindness has two main features, "first, a belief in American society's presentation of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race; and second, a suggestion that pervasive individual deficiencies account for the problems of entire social groups" (p. 175). Data collected from White AP teachers consistently demonstrated these two features. When asked about their perceptions of the Black-White AP gap and what they thought contributed to the phenomenon, White AP teachers had a tendency to individualize issues. At Robinson High, White AP teachers often used the phrase "regardless of race". At both schools, White AP teachers typically suggested that student achievement was attributed to individual characteristics: the students' work ethic, whether they valued education, and the level of parental influence. They were reluctant to talk specifically about race. At Robinson, both the principal and staff development teacher were White and, while eager to talk with me about issues of race, were hesitant to engage White teachers in their school in a discourse that was more color-conscious. They believed that White teachers at their school were uncomfortable talking about race and tended to get defensive.

My conceptual framework for understanding how schools increase the participation and academic achievement of Black students in AP suggested that high teacher expectations and cultural relevancy or responsiveness were influential factors. In using the term cultural relevancy or responsiveness I am drawing from the work of Gay (2002) who argues that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to, among other things, demonstrate caring, build learning communities, and communicate with

ethnically-diverse students. There was little evidence of this type of teaching by White AP teachers at either Robinson or South Gate. Instead, there was overwhelming evidence that White AP teachers preferred to talk about their work with students in a more generic fashion, absent considerations involving culture or race. The data collected for this study are not sufficient for an analysis of why a color-conscious discourse among teachers and staff was hard to establish at these two schools. The research literature, however, suggests that the tendency to evoke colorblindness may be rooted in a variety of factors. According to Tatum (1999), many Whites do not see themselves as belonging to a racial category and, as a result, colorblindness among them can be attributed to a lack of personal understanding about how race shapes life experiences. Carr (1997) suggests that colorblindness among Whites may also arise from a lack of awareness of racial privilege. Another explanation may be that Whites are afraid of being labeled racist and may evoke the language of colorblindness to appear politically correct (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Regardless of the reasons for engaging in colorblind discourse about the Black-White AP gap, these data demonstrate that the perception among Black teachers, students and parents was that White AP teachers at both schools were not engaged in collaborative relationships with them for supporting the participation and academic achievement of Black students in AP classes.

Absence of Collaborative Cultures

At neither Robinson nor South Gate was a collaborative culture evident for supporting the participation and achievement of Black students in AP. By "collaborative culture", I am referring to a network of relationships among school personnel and between school personnel and students and their families. As discussed in detail in

Chapter two, collaborative school cultures are important for supporting the academic achievement of students, particularly Black students who are typically under-represented and under-achieving in rigorous high school curriculum. The absence of collaborative cultures at both Robinson and South Gate may be attributed in part to two issues: 1) accountability environments and 2) reluctance of school personnel to engage in deliberate conversations about race.

Accountability environments at these two schools differed but the influences were similar. At Robinson, various factors impeded the development of a collaborative culture for addressing the Black-White AP gap. First there was less accountability pressure from the school district on the principal, teachers, and staff to address the gap. Secondly, the implementation of a program, the MHS, meant to specifically address the AP gap, gave White teachers an "out". As mentioned before, White AP teachers believed the MHS was responsible for supporting Black AP students. Furthermore, the reluctance of the White principal and staff development teacher to make issues of race more salient during staff development activities may have also contributed to the colorblind ideologies espoused by White AP teachers in this study. Black AP teachers and staff, believing race to be the "elephant in the room" that White teachers and staff did not want to talk about, felt alienated in their work to support Black students. They believed White AP teachers did not recognize the influence of race in their relationships with Black AP students and their parents. These differing perceptions by Black and White teachers and staff seemed to hinder the development of a collaborative culture among them for supporting Black AP students.

At South Gate, the accountability pressures from the school district were more intense. The Black principal, Mr. Jackson, also interested in addressing the AP gap, filtered these pressures down to AP teachers. Feeling scrutinized by the administration in a school characterized by a culture of accountability, White AP teachers engaged in colorblind discourses about student achievement and typically employed deficit and resistance theories for explaining the AP gap. They attributed it to students' unwillingness to work hard, under-preparedness, or lack of support from their parents. Additionally, White AP teachers also believed that administrative policies governing the process of student removal from AP classes contributed to the under-achievement of AP students, particularly Black students. All but one of the AP teachers at South Gate was White. Like the Black AP teachers at Robinson, the Black AP teacher at South Gate, Ms. Winston, believed her White colleagues did not recognize the influence of race in their relationships with black students and were unwilling to develop productive relationships with students and parents who were culturally different from them. Again, differing perceptions of race among Black and White teachers and staff hindered the development of a collaborative culture among them at South Gate for addressing the AP gap.

The reluctance on the part of White AP teachers to talk about race and their tendency to engage in colorblind pedagogies likely hindered the development of productive relationships with Black students and their parents. White AP teachers believed they treated their students equally, regardless of race. At Robinson, students did not necessarily perceive that they were treated differently based on their race, but rather that the majority of their teachers were just "bad" teachers. The majority of the AP teachers at Robinson were White. At South Gate, Black students and parents did believe

race influenced their relationships with White AP teachers. Many believed that White AP teachers had low expectations of them because they were Black. Again, these data do not indicate whether or not White AP teachers at South Gate were racist, but they do demonstrate how perceptions about race influence, in this case hinder, the development of productive relationships between White AP teachers and Black students and their parents.

Implications for Research, Policy and Practice in Schools and School Districts

The current policy context that calls for schools to disaggregate achievement data by race, while seemingly encouraging educators to be attentive to issues of equity, may also contribute to a broader social acceptance of colorblind ideologies. Teachers have assumptions about race and ethnicity that inform their beliefs about students. These preconceptions influence teacher expectations and relationships with students who are culturally different from them. This phenomenon is particularly important given that the majority of teachers, including AP teachers, are White and that Black students continue to be under-represented and under-achieving in AP courses. Additionally, high-stakes accountability environments can influence the way teachers interact with students. These environments often train teachers to look at students, not as their most important responsibility, but rather as "little more than data points" on their roadmaps to adequate yearly progress (Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber, & Buese, 2008, p. 47). In the interest of creating equitable educational opportunities for Black students in secondary schools and supporting their admission to institutions of higher education, it is important to consider the implications of the findings from this study for schools and school districts.

Incorporating Students' Perspectives in Developing Reforms

As is most often the case in educational reform, decisions about how to best serve the needs and interests of students are made by school personnel. They typically create programs and policies absent consideration of the perspectives of the very people they are trying to serve. This study demonstrates that despite the best intentions of administrators and other school personnel at Robinson and South Gate, reforms aimed at addressing the AP gap will likely function more effectively if student and parent perspectives are included. This can happen in a variety of ways. Many secondary schools have committees made up of school staff that meet regularly to discuss instructional issues and implement reforms. Robinson and South Gate had one such committee, the Instructional Council, which met twice a month. Having a student and parent representative on these types of committees would include these often silenced voices. Administrators could also bring together students and parents in focus group interviews or distribute surveys to explore constituent issues, needs, and ideas for reform.

School reform efforts at Robinson and South Gate were context specific and reflected unique needs and issues relevant to each school. In designing and implementing programs for addressing the AP gap, schools need to develop some understanding of the context within which those reforms will be situated. An important part of that context is the students themselves. Understanding Black students' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding their participation and achievement in AP courses is the first step to developing reforms to address the issues.

Fearless Conversations about Race in Teacher Professional Development

Traditional approaches to teacher professional development more often result in the implementation of surface-level techniques than systematic changes in practice (Butler et al., 2004). Such approaches often are characterized by a lack of long-term, strategic professional development planning by administrators, mandates that teachers commit time and energy to activities in which they are not particularly invested, and a focus on rote skills rather than thoughtful decision making. Many teachers perceive that professional development is an addendum to teacher education, a way to fill in the gaps left after finishing a pre-service or graduate-level program. Rather than perpetuate the one-shot, essential skills-based model that is viewed widely as the norm, effective professional development should be longitudinal and challenge teachers to question and rebalance the theoretical, practical, and technical knowledge that guides their practice.

The standards-based reform movement seems to be silencing discussions of race, except when disaggregating test scores (Sleeter, 2005). Freeman (2005) suggested that NCLB actually supports colorblind racism in schools and society. According to Freeman:

> A content analysis of NCLB suggests that the best way to view the problem of inequitable schooling is as a set of self-contained conditions that experts can manipulate adequately and independently of the external environments within which schooling is contained…The act of keeping school reform a largely idiosyncratic enterprise uncoupled from wider cultural and environmental contexts is tantamount to confronting the historic permanence of racial injustice with one eye shut." (p. 194).

As has been suggested by many critical theorists, schools are sites of social reproduction and perform a sorting function (Giroux, 1983; Kincheloe, 2004; Mehan, 1996). And because race matters in American society, the imperative for addressing racism and issues of race explicitly in teacher professional development programs is even more urgent today for addressing disparities in achievement among students of different racial backgrounds.

The persistence of the Black-White AP gap suggests that whether teachers want to acknowledge the salience of race or not, disparities exist in both the participation rates and achievement scores between Black and White students in AP courses. Given the changing face of racism today, masked in subtly coded terms like "colorblind", teacher professional development programs need to confront issues of race, racism, power, and privilege. This requires school districts to be attentive to issues of race in the design of teacher professional development programs and create systems to ensure that teachers engage in color-conscious pedagogical practices. This also requires programs to move beyond teacher professional development, like that employed at Robinson, which focus on cultural differences and ineffectual discussions of embracing multiculturalism in classrooms to discussions that address the salience of race in society and in schools.

Glenn Eric Singleton, President and founder of Pacific Educational Group, an organization that advises school districts in ways to meet the needs of underserved populations of students and address systemic educational inequities, suggests that there are particular skills and dispositions that are important in leading fearless conversations about race (Sparks, 2002). According to Singleton,

Principals start the process by becoming more aware of their own racial identity. It begins as a personal journey. As principals become more comfortable in examining their own racial perspectives and experience, they find they are more willing to engage their teachers in this conversation, first informally then formally. They give personal examples of how they have perpetuated a racial achievement gap and call on staff members to consider how they also might be doing so. These principals express a vision for change in which race no longer predicts student achievement. They guide staff members through discovery of their own racial experiences and how they unconsciously bring them into the classroom" (p. 64).

Singleton argues that transforming school cultures starts with the school leader: the principal.

Sleeter (2005), like Singleton, also argued that teacher professional development also needs to focus on how teachers construct race. In her study of a staff development program that spanned two years, Sleeter analyzed how White teachers processed education about race. She found that many of the twenty-six White teachers began the program with a color-blind perspective. She argues that examinations of race are important particularly for White teachers given the "Whitening" of the teaching force in America (p. 244) and the widespread adoption of colorblind ideologies among them. She also suggested that race education is just as important for teachers of color. Like White teachers, they too have been socialized in an inherently racist society and carry with them into the classroom preconceptions about children based on race.

As suggested by Villegas (2007), a program for supporting teacher learning about issues of race and inequity may also require implementation of dispositional frameworks that attend to social justice in the evaluation of teachers. Villegas defines dispositions in the following way:

> …tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs. A tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is predictive of future actions…A second important feature of this definition is its focus on (teachers') actions rather than their attributes. Since actions can be examined directly, unlike attributes, the complexity of measuring a disposition is somewhat lessened… (p. 373)

Villegas argued that in addition to ensuring that teachers have content and pedagogical knowledge for teaching diverse students, "teachers who aim to make a difference in the lives of diverse students need the disposition to teach all learners equitably" (p. 372). This requires that teacher professional development programs not only create opportunities for teachers to critically examine the beliefs and assumptions they have about race and how these beliefs may influence their relationships with students who are culturally different, but that they demonstrate through practice that they have socially just dispositions.

Tatum (2007) also advocates for teacher professional development that deliberately centers on issues of race. She promotes "antiracist professional development" (p. 39). According to Tatum, educators have to "connect the dots" (p. 40); they need to see the relationship between notions of race and intelligence, the academic under-performance of students of color, and the benefit of what she calls antiracist

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professional development. This type of professional development requires teachers to closely examine their own sense of racial identity and their attitudes towards other groups. In addition, they must engage in racial dialogue. Tatum argues:

> How can we overcome the unconscious impact of internalized stereotypes if we are not able to bring them to consciousness through dialogue? This dialogue among adults is important of course not just for the academic performance of students of color, but also for the effective preparation of all of our students who will live in an increasing multiracial, multiethnic world. (p. 71)

Teacher professional development programs must bring the saliency of race to the forefront and provide ample opportunities for and support of dialogue among White teachers about their perceptions of race. These dialogues also need to occur between White and Black teachers within collaborative school cultures for supporting student achievement.

Building Collaborative Environments Through PLCs

Creating collaborative school cultures centered on equity can be challenging given the pressures experienced by school personnel, particularly teachers, in an increased accountability environment. But they are not impossible to cultivate. Bredeson (2003) identifies several characteristics of teachers' work in schools, two of which are norms of privacy and individualism and personalized professional practice. Despite the research supporting collaboration among school professionals, many teachers – particularly at the secondary level, where content level expertise is a key indicator of effectiveness – see their work as a personal and private craft, built upon their own personalities, unique knowledge, backgrounds, and purposes. There is a difference,

however, between personalization and protectionism. Protectionism can lead to limited opportunity for professional growth, particularly as it pertains to learning about issues of race and deconstructing preconceptions that contribute to deficit-based thinking about students. With teachers working in self-contained classrooms, a concerted effort is required for collaboration in identifying and pursuing shared goals of promoting equity and achievement for all students. As teachers develop and personalize their instruction, they should do so within a culture of collaboration, thus allowing them to bring their own belief systems to the table and learn from colleagues with varied points of view.

One such way to provide this necessary support is to develop learning communities within schools and school systems. Marton-Kniep (2004) defines a professional learning community as an organization that centers its discourse on a key problem set and establishes tangible objectives for addressing it, making improvements, and learning from that process. Not only can PLCs combat the isolation of the classroom and bring teachers in contact with new ideas, but also they can be structured to focus pointedly on instructional improvement and student learning. When properly facilitated and maintained, a PLC promotes the exchange of ideas and the use of feedback to improve professional practice (Martin-Kniep, 2004).

A Focus on Relationship Building

In addition to bringing issues of race front and center and creating collaborative cultures for teacher learning about race and equity, Ferguson (2002) also advocates for teacher professional development that foregrounds the importance of relationships in the teacher-student dyad. He is joined by many other researchers, particularly those who

advocate for cultural relevancy among teachers, in suggesting the importance of relationship building (Dance, 2002; Lareau, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot , 2003).

Ferguson argues that the standard-based reform movement has contributed to a focus on alignment between content standards, the content of curriculum, and the content tested on state assessments. As a result, teacher professional development in the last decade has heavily focused on content and alignment. Ferguson (2002) suggests that within this context, "the possibility that relationships might affect whether students actually learn the content that teachers are trying to teach seldom enters the policy discourse" (p. 19). Analyzing surveys administered to thousands of high school students in fifteen middle- and upper-middle income districts across 10 states, Ferguson suggests that disparities in achievement between Black and Latino students and White and Asian students may be in large part attributed to the absence of productive teacher-student relationships and that these "may be quite important for raising achievement and narrowing achievement gaps" (p. 20). Based on his findings, Ferguson called for more attention to the influence of relationships in student achievement. In addition to focusing on content and pedagogy, Ferguson suggested that teacher professional development programs need to have a combined focus on content, pedagogy, and relationships. These three components make up what he calls the "instructional tripod". According to Ferguson:

> If one leg of the tripod is too weak, it falls over…professional development
> activities that equip teachers to attend simultaneously to all three legs of the
> instructional tripod stand a better chance of helping states meet their education
> policy objectives. We should expect attending to all three will affect teacher's

capacity and commitment to engage students effectively in learning and,

therefore, students' preparation to reach prescribed performance standards (p. 20).

He outlines his approach for teacher professional development that addresses issues of

equity and relationship-building in his discussion of the Tripod Project. He, however,

acknowledges that his project is not unique but "is also consistent with emerging best

practice ideas about professional development and instructional leadership" (p. 20).

As demonstrated throughout this study, educational programs and policies are not

enough to enact reform efforts. In addition to structural change, caring practices,

particularly relationship building, are critical. Teachers need to develop skills and

dispositions for engaging in productive relationships with students and their parents

across racial backgrounds if they are going to address the AP gap.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into the various forces at work within school

districts and schools that influence the participation and achievement of Black students in

AP courses. The intention of this study was to inform school practices. Given the

increasing expectations of colleges and universities for admission and the importance of

AP classes in that process, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to

participate and achieve in these classes is important. This study explored what schools

were doing to support Black student participation and success in AP courses and

examined the various influences on these programs and processes. Additionally, this

study explored the perceptions of school personnel, black students, and their parents in

regards to these programs and processes.

As a high school AP teacher and teacher educator committed to the goals and ideals of teaching for social justice, the most compelling lesson I have learned is the salience of race and its influence on teacher-student relationships. As one of the parents in this study said to me, "It's hard enough out here for our kids because their Black; they don't need their teacher to make it any harder" (4-26-07). Race matters in this country and has implications for access to health care and affordable housing, job opportunities, and, in general, quality of life. As such, race matters in schools. Teachers must move away from colorblindness and toward color-conscious orientations of race. They must confront race, break the silence of race in order to examine their beliefs, and develop dispositions and pedagogical practices that support all children equitably.

As gatekeepers, White AP teachers must be able to critically interrogate their own beliefs about race in order to engage in humanizing pedagogies and build productive relationships with Black students and their families to support their increased participation and achievement in rigorous high school curriculum. Doing so supports equality of opportunity for Black students for admission to institutions of higher education and ultimately opportunities for social mobility and better quality of life.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participation and Success in Advance Placement, 2005

Who Takes AP Tests?

Example: Of all AP test taker, this proportion were African Americans.

	Public K-12 Enrollment	Calculus AB	English Language & Composition	Biology
African American	**17%**	**5%**	**7%**	**6%**
Asian	4%	16%	12%	19%
Latino	19%	8%	13%	8%
Native American	1%	0%	1%	0%
White	58%	71%	68%	67%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number	48,344,926	170,931	212,319	110,713

Who Scores a 3, 4, or 5?

	Calculus AB	English Language & Composition	Biology
African American	**28%**	**26%**	**30%**
Asian	62%	58%	69%
Latino	35%	30%	36%
Native American	42%	43%	43%
White	61%	64%	65%
Overall	58%	56%	61%

*Data is not reported where there were less than 25 test takers in the state.

Source: The Education Trust. (2006). *EdWatch Online State Summary Reports*. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/summaries2006/USA.pdf

Appendix B: Conceptual Framework/ Participation & Achievement of Black Students in AP Courses

Collective Sense of Responsibility

(Collaborative Culture Governed by Productive School-Family Relationships)

Parent involvement/ support

Teacher cultural relevancy
(Relationship-building)

Structured academic support

High teacher expectations

Recruitment & academic
success of Black students
in AP courses

Social/ peer group support
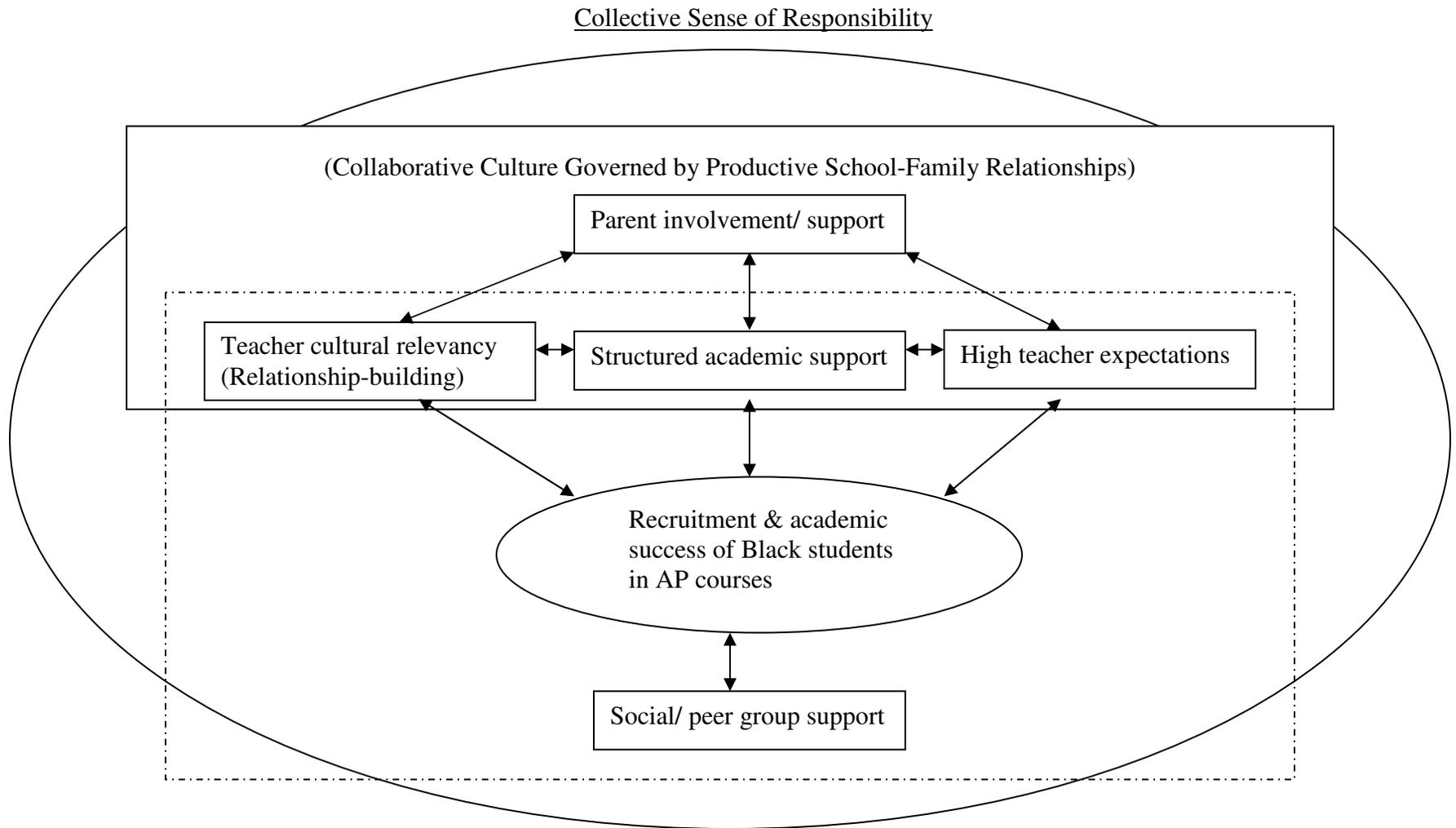
Appendix C: Conceptual Framework Revisited/ Robinson High

<u>School District Policy Context- Accountability Pressures</u>
(WEAK)

School Culture of Achievement

Parent involvement/ support

Staff Development Agenda:
Equity and Diversity

Structured academic support:
Minority Honors Society

Social/ peer group support

Recruitment & academic
success of Black students
in AP courses
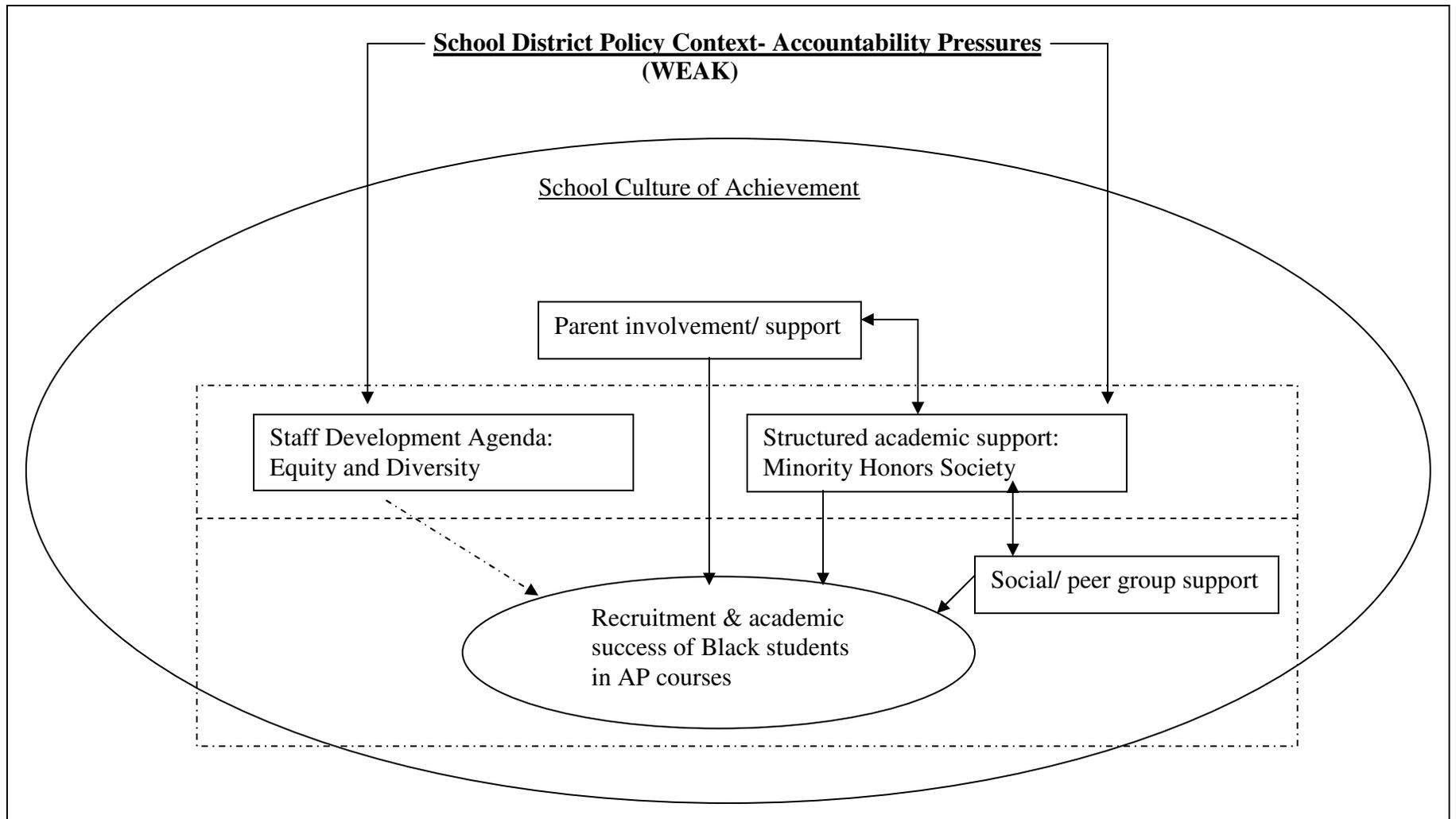
Appendix D: Conceptual Framework Revisited/ South Gate High

School District Policy Context- Accountability Pressures
(INTENSE)

School Culture of Accountability

Parent involvement/ support

Administrative Policy: Protocol for dropping AP classes

Structured academic support: Brown Bags

Two of four SLCs

Participation & academic success of Black students in AP courses

Social/ peer group support
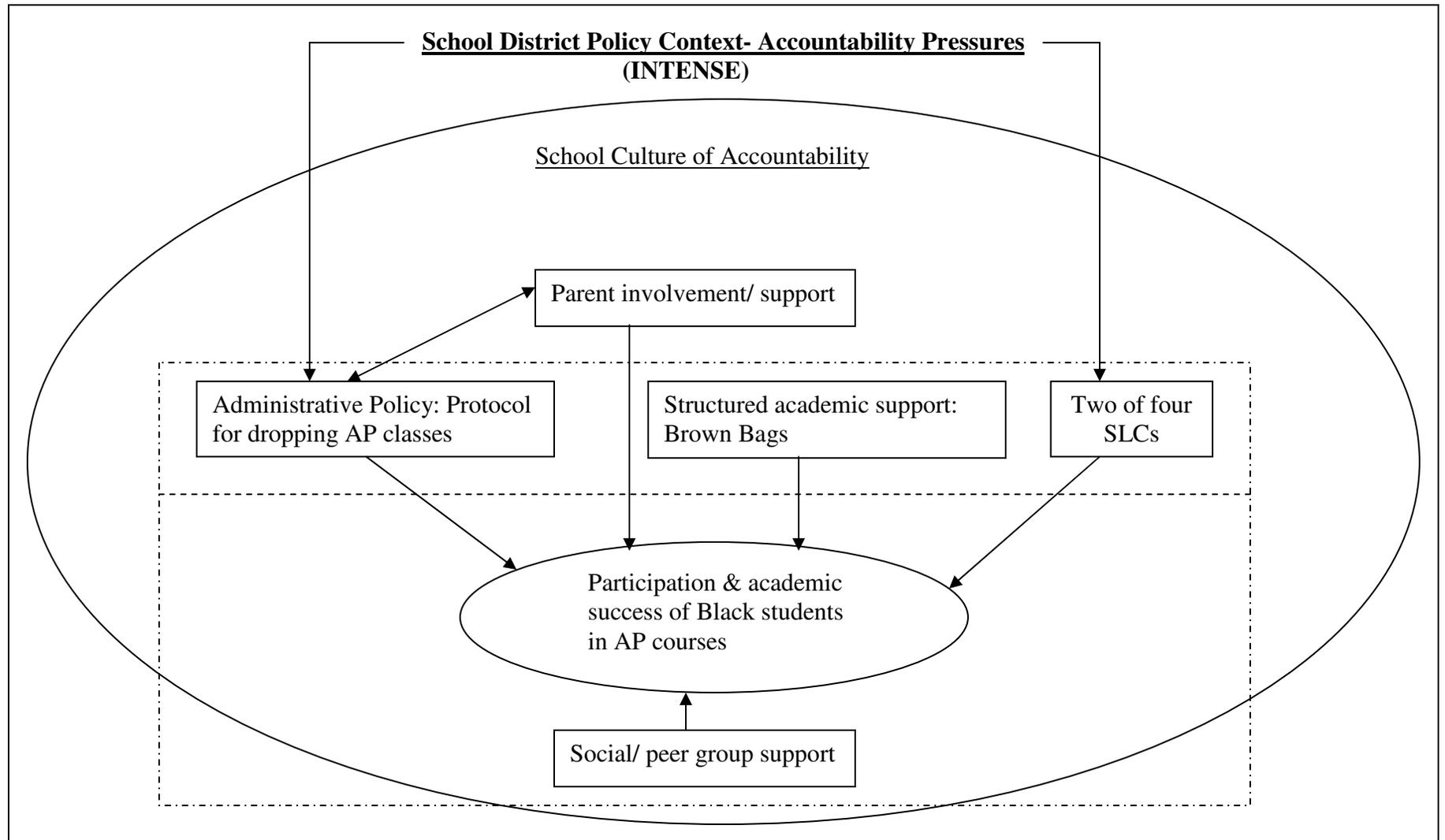
Appendix E: Interview Protocols

Initial Interview with Participating Administrators/ School Counselors

Background
- How long have you been working at this school?
- This study is looking at what schools do to recruit and support the academic achievement of African American students in AP courses. Do you have any prior experience with recruiting African American students in AP and/ or supporting their achievement in these courses? If so, tell me a little about them.

School Improvement Objectives
- Tell me about the school improvement objectives related to African American student achievement.
- In what specific ways does the school plan to meet those objectives (special programs, funding of initiatives, allocation of material resources, faculty resources)?
    o What do you see as your role in relation to these objectives?
    o What do you believe in general is the faculty role in meeting these objectives?
        - Are there any teachers in particular that you are calling upon to take some leadership in meeting these goals? If so, who are they and why are they leaders?
        - Are there teachers in this school who may not be assuming leadership roles in meeting these objectives but you believe support these objectives through their individual classroom practices and relationships with students? If so, who are they and why do you believe this?
    o What do you see as the parents roles in relation to these objectives?
        - In what ways, if at all, are parents involved in the schools plans for meeting these objectives?
        - Are there any parents who are working in collaboration with the school and assuming leadership roles in meeting these objectives? If so, who are they and why do you consider them leaders?
        - Are there parents who may not be assuming leadership roles in meeting these objectives but you believe support these objectives through their individual classroom practices and relationships with students? If so, who are they and why do you believe this?
- How will you know if and/ or when you have either met your objectives or are making progress toward them?
    o What is the school's time line for meeting these objectives?

Initial Interview with Participating Teachers

<u>Background</u>
- How long have you been working at this school?
- This study is looking at what schools do to recruit and support the academic achievement of African American students in AP courses. Do you have any prior experience with recruiting African American students in AP and/ or supporting their achievement in these courses? If so, tell me a little about them.

<u>School Improvement Objectives</u>
- Tell me about the schools' improvement objectives related to African American student achievement. (Probe here for specifics related to supporting student achievement in AP courses).
- In what specific ways does the school plan to meet those objectives (special programs, funding of initiatives, allocation of material resources, faculty resources)?
- What do you see as the role of the administration in relation to these objectives?
- What do you see as your role in relation to these objectives?
    - How do you plan to work towards meeting these objectives?
    - What types of resources do you have (material, personnel, professional development) to help you work towards this goal?
        - What might you want that you do not have?
- What do you believe in general is the faculty role in relation to these objectives?
    - Are there any teachers in particular that you believe are actively working to support these objectives? If so, who are they and why do you believe this?
    - In what ways do you plan to collaborate with other teachers in working towards meeting these objectives?
- What do you believe is the role of parents in relation to these objectives?
    - In what ways do you plan to collaborate with parents in working towards meeting these objectives?
- What do you believe is the role of students in relation to these objectives?
- How will you know if and/ or when you have either met your objectives or are making progress toward them?

Initial Interview with Participating Students

General Background
- What grade are you in this year?
- What is your GPA? Weighted GPA?
- Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? Have a job outside of school? Do any volunteer work?
- Do you have any plans to go on to college after high school?
  - If so, have you thought about where you might like to go? What you will study? Why?
- What subjects that you've studied in high school do you like and why?
- Have you had any teachers in high school who you felt were really good? Why?
- Do you have access to a computer and the inter net at home?
  - How tech savvy would you say you are? Why?

AP Background
- Is this your first AP class?
  - If so…
    - How did you come to the decision to take this AP course and why are you taking it?
    - Do you have friends taking this course with you? Do you have friends who have taken AP courses before?
    - Do you have friends who are not taking any AP courses or who have never taken any? If so, do they express any particular reactions to you being in AP?
    - Have you taken honors classes before? What were they and how well did you do in them?
  - If not…
    - What other AP course have you taken?
    - Why did you take them? How well did you do?
    - Do you have friends taking this course with you? Do you have friends who have taken AP courses before?
    - Do you have friends who are not taking any AP courses or who have never taken any? If so, do they express any particular reactions to you being in AP?
- How do you feel about your AP courses?
- Will you take others?
- If you had a chance to do it over, would still decide to take AP classes?

Academic Achievement in AP
- How well prepared to you feel going into this school year for your AP course(s)?
    - What do you attribute this to (experiences, support from parents, teachers, friends)?
- Tell me a little about your study habits.
    - Probe for;
        - Where do you study/ do homework?
        - How much time do you spend on school work
        - Do you wait until the last minute to complete school work or plan ahead?
        - Do you participate in study groups?
- What do you think you need to do in order to well academically in AP courses?
- What do you think might help you do well in AP this year (experiences, support from parents, teachers, friends)?

Initial Interview with Participating Parents

<u>Background</u>
- Tell me a little about your education experiences (high school/ vocational school/ college graduate, areas of interest).
    - o What are your attitudes about education and schooling in general? Why?
    - o In what ways do you think these attitudes get conveyed to your children?
    - o What do you think is the attitude of your children towards education and schooling? Why?
- Are you currently employed? If so, what do you do?
    - o Do you talk to your children about your job? Why or why not?
- How many children do you have?
    - o How old are they? Where do they go to school?
    - o Are any diagnosed with learning disabilities or in special education?
    - o To your knowledge, are any of them on any particular academic "tracks" (skills level, honors/ AP)?
- What do you know about the AP program in general?

<u>Home Environment</u>
- Do you speak any languages other than English in your home with your children?
    - o If so, what languages?
- Are you near your children when they are doing homework?
    - o Where do they do their homework?
    - o How much time do they spend on their homework?
    - o Do they ever come to you for help with their homework?
        - ➢ If so, how often and how confident do you feel about helping them?
        - ➢ If not, do you ask them about their homework and/ or what they are learning in school?
            - ▪ If so, how do they respond?

<u>Relationships with School</u>
- What AP courses is your child taking? Why?
- How much contact/ communication do you have with your child's AP teachers?
    - o What is the nature of the contact?
    - o Who initiates it?
        - ➢ When you do, how responsive are the AP teachers?
    - o What is the mode of communication (phone, email, letters in the mail)?
- Are you involved in the school PTSA or any other parent organizations at the school (booster club, volunteer)?
    - o If so, why and what is your involvement?
    - o If not, why?
- Are you familiar with the schools' improvement goals? If so, what are they?

<u>Hopes for Children</u>
- What do you hope your children will do after high school (get married, have families, go to college, work)? Why?

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