

**EQUITY IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSE-TAKING:
A CASE STUDY OF AN INNER-RING SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The academic intensity of one's high school experience is most important to success in college. Tracking causes in-school segregation that most often results in low levels of participation by students of color and low socioeconomic status (SES) in upper level classes, including Advanced Placement (AP). Using a practitioner's vantage point, this dissertation is a mixed-method case study of AP course-taking at one inner-ring suburban high school that eliminated its lowest track prior to the first year of data analysis and allowed open enrollment to AP courses prior to the third. To track the impact of these changes, five years of AP course-taking data were analyzed for participation by students of color and those of low SES. The data revealed an increase in AP course enrollment by students of color from 12% to 22%, and by students of low SES from 2% to 8%. Interviews with 19 influential educators followed the quantitative analysis. In five years, this diverse Pennsylvania public high school moved from a system characterized by a number of barriers preventing low-income and minority students from taking higher level courses to an institution that has provided a rich choice of AP course offerings, established a Black Scholars program to encourage the academic success of students of color, and created open enrollment to its AP courses. While all teachers had some struggles adjusting to teaching AP courses in open enrollment era, teachers assumed either a resistant stance and intimidating approach to non-traditional AP students or a progressive stance, inviting and supporting non-traditional students in their course. Those teachers who created an emotionally and academically safe environment, expressed caring for their students, and employed flexible approaches to instruction and

assessment attracted the most diverse set of students to their AP courses. Lincoln is not necessarily a model school as more work is needed to continue to create rigorous, inclusive learning environments in all classes, yet this study indicates that if students have the opportunity to take on challenging coursework like AP and work to master the course with the support of excellent teachers, long-term reward is sure to follow.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing consensus about the importance of college for life trajectories and opportunities, students of color and students from low socioeconomic families¹ are substantially underrepresented in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. This fact is important because researchers have increasingly recognized that “the academic intensity of a student’s high school curriculum was the most important precollegiate predictor of bachelor’s degree completion” (Adelman, 2006). Most high-paying careers require a college degree, which is dependent on students’ secondary school experience. Since we have a secondary school system that is functionally discriminatory based on race and class (Oakes, 2005; Tyson, 2011), we need to examine secondary school leadership and school practices as they relate to course-taking. Analyzing AP course-taking provides a window for analyzing equity in secondary school. Who takes the most demanding high school curricula is an issue of social justice.

Access to and success in AP for students of color and those in poverty is very low nationally and acutely so in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In the United States in 2010, Black or African American students made up 14.6% of the graduating class, but only 3.9% of Black students scored a 3 on the at least one AP test. The percentage of Pennsylvania’s 2010 graduates who were Black was 13.9%, but just 2.0% scored a 3 or higher on an AP test, which was last of the fifty states. For Latinos in the United States as a whole, 16.8% of the 2010 graduating class were

¹ Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch are considered economically disadvantaged, consistent with United States Department of Education definition established in NCLB.

Latino, though 14.6% of successful AP examinees were Latino. Latinos made up 5.4% of the graduating class in Pennsylvania in 2010, but only 2.4% of them scored a 3 or higher on an AP test, which ranked 49th of the 50 states. These data do not include students who drop out from school. AP courses position students for college and the overwhelming majority of students of color and low SES coming out of high school lack the important experience they would get by enrolling in these rigorous courses.

Many school leaders and researchers are trying to address this inequity in AP by providing greater access to AP courses. One diverse, inner-ring suburban high school in Pennsylvania that was recognized by *Newsweek* in 2010 as one of the top schools in the nation has reduced academic tracks and expanded access to their AP courses. This study aims to analyze to what extent and how this school is providing equity² in its AP program. The overarching goal is to provide insight into the process for schools, districts, and researchers interested in promoting increased access and equity in high school course-taking.

Statement of the Problem

The failure to achieve true integration at the classroom level is an enormous loss. “No other American institution other than schools brings together so many children from so many diverse backgrounds, for so much time each day, over so many years. Not families, not churches, not neighborhoods” (Tyson, 2011, pp. 10-

² The quality of being fair, impartial, and just; for the purpose of this study, having proportional representation of students of color and of students who are economically disadvantaged in AP courses compared the student body as a whole.

11). Academic segregation within schools that limits access to rigorous curricula creates achievement gaps.

Achievement gaps are more complex and varied than the proficiency line and Adequate Yearly Progress. Having more students pass basic tests in eleventh grade does not mean the school is doing an adequate job of preparing its students for higher education. Taking a rigorous course load that includes substantial college-level reading and analytical writing is a better gauge for measuring the school's effectiveness in preparing students for higher education.

Access to AP courses matters. These courses matter because they help students get into college and persist once they get there because they have already developed the academic skills, practice, and confidence needed for collegiate level academic engagement. Students can also earn college credit before they even finish high school. If fewer students of color and low-income students are in AP classes, fewer of these students are likely to complete college due to lack of rigorous academic experience and due to starting college with no credits. College completion is increasingly important for 21st century careers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

While today more students are going to college, the increase in post-secondary education over the past three decades has been bottom-heavy, where racial minorities and lower-income students are tracked into community colleges and less selective colleges, and ultimately into careers with lower earnings and status (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). Such students may need remedial courses, pushing degree completion further from reach. Thus, course-taking and the links

between course-taking and race and class is a critical problem in the perpetuation of advantage and disadvantage.

In order to provide greater secondary school academic rigor for students of color and those from low socioeconomic status (SES), school leaders need evidence, description, and analysis of public secondary schools that are creating greater opportunities for underrepresented students by placing them into academically demanding high school courses, like AP. This study aims to analyze how secondary school administrators, counselors and teachers can better position students of color and low-income for success in AP courses, thereby putting them on paths to success in college (Burris and Garrity, 2008).

Site of the case study. This study focuses on a racially diverse high school that has been nationally recognized for its AP success. *Newsweek* recognized this school as one of the Top 100 high schools in the nation in 2010 and the *Washington Post* recognized it in 2011 for students' high rate of participation and performance on AP tests. The school is an inner-ring suburb in the northeast United States that is racially diverse. According to the Core of Common Data, in 2009-10, the student body was composed of the following racial percentages: African American 46%, White 43%, Asian 7%, and Latino 4%. Nearly twenty percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The school district is a participating member in a regional minority student achievement consortium. This high school has been aggressive in addressing overall inequities in course taking, eliminating its lowest academic tracks over the past several years while increasing access to honors and AP courses.

Inner-ring suburban schools are becoming increasingly diverse, creating new challenges and opportunities. Such schools provide interesting opportunities for analyzing academic achievement since they often have traditions of academic success, dwindling tax bases, and shifting racial demographics. Suburban schools, while becoming more diverse, often have complex academic tracking systems that are inequitable (Tyson, 2011).

The high school that is the site of this study, which will be referred to as Lincoln High School, shares a boarder with a major city in the northeast region of the United States. Wealthier more homogeneous school districts lie further from the city, while the large urban school district shares the longest boarder with the Lincoln school district. The school building, just a short turn off a major street that divides the city and the county and is adjacent to a highway that takes you quickly to the further suburbs. It is a substantial two-story mostly brick structure built in 1959 on an approximately 47 acre-campus. Surrounded by modest athletic fields in the front, west and back, the building has been added to multiple times. This gives the school the appearance of having evolved over the years rather than having been planned with a single design concept. Inside, the school has two theaters – one that seats a few hundred and the other roughly 1,000. Narrow hallways are lined with grey vertical lockers. Some classrooms are outfitted with updated technology for student and teacher use while other classrooms have little more than slate blackboards, wooden ledges, and chalk.

Lincoln's community is socially progressive and the school has a strong union culture. Adults in the community point to diversity in race, socioeconomic status,

and sexual preference as strengths of the township. Creativity expressed through the arts is another touchstone for the adults and students in the community. The school's faculty is overwhelmingly tenured and experienced; most hold advanced degrees. A strong union culture has established itemized working conditions and one of the better salary structures among suburban schools in the area. A traditional eight-period, 47-minute bell schedule has been maintained while other area districts have moved to modified block schedules. The Lincoln community is progressive, and its faculty is well-established.

Over the decade, the student body has become increasingly diverse. In 2007, 43% of the students were students of color; at present over 50% of students are. There is no majority racial or ethnic group, though African American students now comprise the largest plurality. Nearly 1,500 students attend the high school, composed of students in grades 9-12. One teacher described the students at Lincoln as having "crusty exteriors," as a function of growing up on the edge of the city.

Historic academic tracking. Until 2007, a complex set of academic tracks characterized the academic program, with a small, elite, highly accomplished cohort of students in the most demanding courses and layers of lower sections, with predominantly African American students composing the least rigorous track. As one teacher described, "We had two rivers [in this school- African American and white] that rarely crossed except in gym and a couple of other places." Such are typical characteristics of a highly tracked school (see, for example, Oakes, 2005).

Entering the 2007-08 school year, the school district made a shift to eliminate the lowest academic track. Two years later in 2009-10, the school allowed

students the opportunity to have open enrollment to honors and AP courses, instead of relying on standardized test scores and teacher recommendations for permission to enroll in upper level courses. This study begins with data from 2007-08, at that transition to eliminating the lowest track, continues through 2009-10 with open enrollment to honors and AP courses, and concludes in the 2011-12 school year, three years into open enrollment. Some educators, as the qualitative data indicate, prefer the old days of Lincoln HS with its highly tracked system while others emerged as leaders for equity in this era of transition.

Purpose of the Study

I am interested in how school systems and educators can help position and support students of color and low-income students for success in AP courses. Reducing achievement gaps and fostering widespread high academic performance is an important part of school leaders' jobs. Given the links between a college education and future social and economic outcomes (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 2010), it is particularly essential that school leaders develop and refine practices that will promote high-level course taking for all students in the their school—regardless of race and class background. Providing equity in a school is complex. This study aims to get underneath the complexity, consider the quantitative course-enrollment data and engage in some dialogue about how people do their work and how they feel about it. In this study, I am looking for incremental progress and pockets of success regarding equity in AP course enrollment.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study is: To what extent and how does a high achieving, diverse high school provide equity in course-taking, particularly in Advanced Placement courses? Related questions are: 1) Are the students taking AP courses and AP exams reflective of the racial and SES school demographics as a whole and are the classes becoming more equitable in the wake of concerted efforts on the part of educators to increase access? 2) What are the ways that adults in the school prepare, recruit and support students from underrepresented groups in the AP program? 3) What are the obstacles or challenges in providing an equitable AP program?

Significance of this Study

Practically, this study aims to advance how schools and school leaders can provide successful access to AP courses for underrepresented students³. Further, this study may add to theoretical understandings regarding how to disrupt patterns of social reproduction that have important roots in students' secondary school experiences. A focused curriculum with equitable access and support is the basis for providing broad, successful academic achievement across the student body (Chenoweth, 2007; Burris and Garrity, 2008). Very often, however, through tracking high schools dictate which students get to participate in the most rigorous courses and who gets shut out of those courses. Analysis of how schools are successfully addressing inequity in upper level courses is needed (Darling-

³ African American students, Latino students, and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch status. Such students will also be referred to as non-traditional AP students throughout this dissertation.

Hammond, 2010) to provide examples of increasing equity and excellence in secondary schools (Burriss and Garrity, 2008). The students in each school who participate in rigorous courses with focused curricula are those who will be positioned for success in college.

The aim of this study is to describe a complex, complicated phenomenon. If effective, this study will get underneath the complexity of course-taking at one inner-ring suburban high school—by sharing quantitative enrollment data, exploring how people do their work and how they feel about it, looking for incremental progress, and seeking pockets of success. In the end, this study sheds light on the possibilities and challenges inherent to increasing diversity in AP courses.

Background

Tracking exacerbates achievement gaps since African American, Latino and economically disadvantaged students are overrepresented in lower-level classes and underrepresented in honors and AP classes (Lucas, 1999; Auerbach, 2002; Oakes, 2005, Tyson, 2011). The majority of suburban students attend large comprehensive high schools that often include complex systems of tracking. These tracking systems restrict academic possibilities for students in the lower tracks, sorting students in ways that those left out of the top track do not have access to the same curriculum (Oakes, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007). Despite the critical importance of rigorous high school course-taking for completing college (Adelman, 2006), the issue of tracking gets relatively little public attention (Tyson, 2011).

Rather than put the burden on families to understand and navigate the complex process of accessing a rigorous high school curriculum, high school leaders inside the system could lead the push for equity. “School officials agree that these students deserve a better chance—yet policies and practices continually deprive them of opportunities” (Anyon, 2009, p. 21). Recognizing that educational jargon and complex institutional processes sometimes lead to low-income parents adopting a passive role and leaving educational decisions to the school (Christenson and Hirsh, 1998; Lareau, 1987), school leaders may find themselves being the critical agents in addressing equity concerns in upper level course enrollment in suburban high schools.

Theoretical Base

A researcher’s analysis of data is laden with theory. Anyon (2009) states, “One does not go into the field to ‘see’—one goes to ‘look’ for various sorts of patterns and themes” (p. 4). Theory helps to deepen the research process and gives meaning to the data. My theoretical framework takes shape primarily through the lens of social reproduction theory and secondarily through the theory of policy as practice. In high school course selection and rostering, upper level courses like AP courses that are populated by students in the highest track of the school system tend to be populated by students whose parents are wealthy, white and well educated. To understand this pattern, I will outline social reproduction theory as it applies to high school course-taking. More practically, I am interested in a systems approach that seeks to uncover what local educational leaders do to interrupt social

reproduction by positioning students of color and those from low socioeconomic status into the most demanding curricula, like AP courses. The role of local school administrators, counselors and teachers is crucial to analyzing who takes AP courses, and so finally, I will review the literature of policy as practice.

Social reproduction theory. Social reproduction theory holds that schools' structures and processes reproduce the social structure. According to scholars within this tradition, while schools appear to be engines of social mobility they actually operate in subtle and not-so-subtle ways to ensure that most students leave school prepared to take up the class position held by their parents. While low-income Black and Latino students are overrepresented in remedial educational programs, more germane to this study, these students are underrepresented in honors and AP classes, negatively affecting their post-secondary opportunities (Lucas, 1999; Auerbach, 2002; Oakes, 2005). Children from families of higher socioeconomic status enter schools already familiar with schools' organizational culture. Children from lower classes are shut out of the society's economic advantages of secondary school as a result, since lack of social and cultural capital has a final economic effect; according to Bourdieu (1983): "Economic capital is at the root for all the other types of capital, including social capital...Every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital" (p. 252). Thus, while people interacting with the school leverage their relationships to promote their own advancement, those whose resources are not valued by the school do not see the benefits that would ultimately lead to greater economic opportunity.

Social reproduction happens through schools even if school leaders are conflicted about those results. Jean Anyon, a prominent neo-Marxist theorist and critic of education in the United States, promotes the use of theory to encourage action against injustice. Theory and data should interact to uncover the roles that structure and agency serve in a fuller picture of social production and reproduction (Anyon, 2009, p. 6). “We choose theories because...their adoption may lead to new and interesting data and explanations, and—importantly—because they may provide some purchase on progressive strategies for social change” (p. 8). Educators know that their practices tend to reinforce social patterns that students come to school with, but educators still continue to struggle with how to work differently so that those who are underrepresented in upper level courses have a more successful trajectory than they otherwise would have had.

Lareau (2003) found that upper- and middle-class parents used social networks and cultural knowledge to advocate for their children and challenge educators’ decisions. The result is a “personalized education” for their children and a “generic education” for others. In the context of social reproduction, these parents are leveraging political pressure on school leaders to get a more rigorous education for their children who already enter school with advantage. Lareau (1987) found middle-class parents carefully followed their children’s curriculum and frequently contacted teachers; such parents “had extensive information about classroom and school life” (p. 80). In contrast, working-class parents rarely initiated contact with teachers, were stiff and awkward in those interactions, and generally turned over the responsibility for education to the teacher (pp. 78-81). Those students who

have fewer advantages coming into school get left further behind so that by the time those students leave high school, they have limited post-secondary options, due in large part, to a lack of social and cultural capital. Lareau recommends that further analysis of the importance of advantage and disadvantage is likely to be found by “turning our attention to the structure of opportunity and to the way in which individuals proceed through that structure” (pp. 83-84). This study aims to study structure and process in high school course-selection while considering equity and the effects of social and cultural capital.

ACORN (1998) has documented that low-income parents of color have not been well informed of gifted programs and how they are accessed. This example of lack of parents’ institutional knowledge has important implications, including the fact that Black and Latino students are underrepresented in New York City’s elite high schools. While the recent overall New York City school district was 39% Black and 34% Latino, celebrated Stuyvesant High was comprised of 5% and 4% and Bronx Science High School 11% and 9% of these respective subgroups of students (ACORN, 1998).

Due to the fact that “For the most part, middle and high schools are engines of inertia” (Chenoweth, 2007, p. 27) and therefore largely inflexible, parents without the dominant class’s social and cultural capital unsuccessfully navigate complex enrollment processes or ineffectively challenge school administrators’ decisions (Perez, 2009). Even though low-income urban parents have their own social networks and cultural resources, Valenzuela (1999) found that their tools were not effective enough to overcome exclusionary tracking practices or deficit orientations

of the schools their children attended. The effect is that underprivileged students of color most often lack access to the most rigorous coursework.

Lack of rigorous secondary school coursework is an important factor in keeping disadvantaged students in low socioeconomic status into adulthood. Tracking and course selection reproduce class patterns as deficit orientations become part of schools' organizational culture. Students of color and low-income often end up in the lowest tracks, which then makes it hard for them to go to college and persist once they arrive. Understanding how to open up the most challenging high school coursework to all students and helping them succeed once they get into courses like AP courses can disrupt this pattern of class reproduction.

Local practitioners make policy. In order to understand how social reproduction takes shape in schools, we need to understand what educators are doing in schools to either reinforce socioeconomic patterns or disrupt these patterns. High school course selection is not dictated by federal or state law, but rather tends to take shape in counselors' offices as guided by the school's course selection guidelines. Individual teachers and administrators play important roles in determining the range of options available to students, positioning students to take advantage of these options, and channeling students in particular directions. For this reason, to understand the relationship between course selection and social mobility, we must look closely at teachers', counselors', and administrators' practices as they are manifest at the local level.

Lipsky (2010) has made an influential contribution to understanding how government policy is operationally delivered to citizens, arguing that bureaucratic

practitioners make policy at the street level when implementing the details of a law or administrative policy. Despite increased measures of accountability and punishment from federal and state departments of education resulting from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 and subsequent legislation, local schools that are not failing by NCLB measures have been left largely free to continue operating at the direction of local school leaders. In the case of tracking and course-taking there is no directive from federal or state law, and so understanding what influential educators do at the school district and school level is the crux to understanding course-taking as a phenomenon. Analyzing the effects of school course-taking policies and asking educators who are effective at motivating and supporting students of color and low SES to explain what they do is the aim of this study. So, this study is focused on the local school's organizational systems and the actions of individual educators in the school.

Lipsky's (2010) theory is applicable to this study: "Schools...have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits" (p. xi), and high school educators are the critical agents in making course-taking operational. "At best, street-level bureaucrats invent modes of mass processing that more or less permit them to deal with the public fairly, appropriately, and thoughtfully. At worst, they give in to favoritism, stereotyping, convenience, and routinizing" (p. xiv). This study aims to analyze what local educators are doing, at their best, to effectively help make AP course enrollment more diverse in terms of race and class.

Sutton and Levinson's work (2001), which focuses on the construction of social realities, by both authoritative and by ordinary practices, is also useful.

Sutton and Levinson analyze policy as a practice of power. “Smaller-scale institutions, such as businesses and local schools, may enact their own policies to specify proper procedure and conduct” (p. 3). And yet, Sutton and Levinson find that authorized policy is “constantly *negotiated* and reorganized in the ongoing flow of institutional life” [emphasis theirs] (p. 2). Wiggle room exists between codified policies and the conceptions and actions of local actors. A sociocultural perspective to how people engage in and shape policy, “replete with political subjectivities and differentials of power,” (Koyama, 2011, p. 21) is an apt lens for this study. “Local actors’ interpretations and negotiations in the contexts of their everyday interactions and practices” (p. 22) critically affect complex policy implementation. And so, this study will examine interactions and practices at Lincoln HS as they relate to AP course-taking.

Benefits of taking AP courses

While there is ample literature on AP course-taking, the views of teachers and administrators at Lincoln also provides important context. Thus, before moving to a review of the relevant literature on this topic, it is useful to review local understandings of the benefits of taking AP courses. The participants in this study pointed to several layers of benefits to students who enroll in AP courses: intellectual, social, confidence, mentoring, and college credit.

Intellectually, AP courses provide an opportunity to explore a subject in depth and under the close supervision of a teacher. While students are not participants in this study, educators argued that their ability to interact with their

students five times a week each school day allowed them to foster and support higher levels of learning. As a result, students are provided academic rigor and some independence, but they have the support of certified high school teachers who are practiced in pedagogical methodologies. In college, students have substantially less class time, more independent work, and more limited access to professors.

Specifically, the subjects in this study pointed to the value of instruction on how to read dense textbooks, how to properly study for content mastery, and how to write analytically through AP essays. One teacher at Lincoln described the benefits in this way: “You’re going to really learn to read a college-level book with supports of being in high school. That’s the biggest gain. You have to learn to read the book, how to really take notes, how to study. I have juniors in AP who have no idea what real studying means.” Ms. Ford described that the greater intellectual experience of taking an AP course results in a maturation process for students that gives them practice in becoming scholars and thinking about themselves as such. Mr. Edwards stated that students develop higher-level learning and thinking skills, and they get a foretaste of what college classroom life will sort of be like. Several subjects pointed to the intellectual benefit that results from students engaging in a rigorous, methodical approach to the subject of the AP course.

Socially, students in AP courses get to engage with a self-selecting group of students who tend to be highly motivated. Ms. Leaf stated that students in AP courses should expect to hear debate from different points of view and will have some opportunities to participate in inquiry learning. Students and teachers are

aware that even as they build a community of learners, they are being measured against a national, even global, standard when they sit for their AP exams.

After the course, when AP exam scores are returned, most often students have built a level of confidence where they feel they can successfully master rigorous, college-level course material. According to Ms. Rose, “The way you build self-esteem is to kind of let them struggle through something and be successful. And it’s a risk...” While increased confidence is not guaranteed and usually does not come right away, by the end of the course students are better prepared for college.

Mentoring, on an intellectual level, takes place between teachers and their students in AP classes. Ms. Nelson stated that, “Teachers love what they teach [in their AP courses]; [There is] discourse at a higher level- what a college course would look like...It’s intensive. You want to be sure that that student is as invested in this as you are.” Ms. Nelson continued,

For teachers, there’s a sense of ownership in an AP class. A sense of elitism...I felt like I was almost inducted into a club [laughs] when I started teaching it...It’s the flip side of their passion for that subject...they want to make sure that everybody’s aboard their train, going at their pace, and that you are this caliber of student...there are a certain caliber of students they expect to come in there. So if you don’t have the skills necessary it’s hard to catch up sometimes.

Teachers take pride in the depth and specificity of the curriculum in the AP course they teach, and they expect their students to demonstrate similar dedication.

Finally, participants pointed out that students may earn college credit with passing scores on their AP exams, though this was generally considered an ancillary benefit. If students earn college credit, they are either able to place out of a required course or be permitted to more quickly enroll in upper level courses in their college major. AP courses also enhance student transcripts.

Summary

Access to rigorous coursework is critically important to students to prepare them for the rigors of college. Tracking reduces opportunities for students, systematically for students of color and from low SES homes, and so examining this problem is important in shedding light on how to create greater cognitive challenges as a matter of sociocultural school operations and as a matter of social justice. Detracking creates systemic change in school culture – for both students and teachers – that creates greater opportunity for students who formerly were assigned to lower tracks and simultaneously creates angst about losing control over who enrolls in which courses.

The site of this case study is an inner-ring suburban public high school with an established and highly tracked academic tradition where school leaders recently have been making efforts to create more rigorous academic opportunities for non-traditional AP students. The community is progressive, valuing cultural diversity. Students at Lincoln HS grow intellectually, socially and in confidence as a result of taking AP classes; they also benefit from mentoring and potential college academic credit.

Theories regarding social reproduction and policy implementation inform this study. Processes in highly tracked schools tend to result in reproduction of social classes in the subsequent generation. Those parents and students, regularly those of color and low SES, who lack social and cultural capital are denied access to the most rigorous high school coursework and ultimately pay a life-long economic

price for that lack of rigorous instruction they receive in high school. The street-level implementation of course registration and the negotiated processes that result from the words and actions of influential educators in the school are better understood when policy is considered as practice.

The aim of this study is to understand the ways in which the school system and influential educators increase equitable access to AP coursework. Public schools have the responsibility of providing successful academic achievement broadly across the student body so that students are well prepared for success in college. Thus, this study explores the complex and complicated process of increasing equity in AP course-taking at Lincoln HS, an inner-ring suburban high school.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Institutional structures, course enrollment, and student outcomes are importantly linked to one another. Students of color and those from low-income families most often get stuck in lower tracks and are unable to get access to the school's most advanced courses, like AP. The rigor of students' coursework is critically important to their post-secondary academic success (Adelman, 2006). Such inequities at the high school level create broad and lasting social effects.

This study is concerned with equity in AP course-taking. Several important strands of professional and scholarly literature inform and position this study. The first establishes the importance of AP course-taking, who is taking AP, and how those students are performing in AP courses and exams. The second strand concerns the obstacles to underrepresented students enrolling in AP courses, including the problems with tracking. The third strand focuses on effective inclusive practices that broaden participation in AP.

Equity in the Advanced Placement program

Importance of AP course-taking. High school students who take courses with college-level content are certainly going to be better prepared for college and persist once they get there. Two reasons that AP courses are important to collegiate completion are: the experience of the coursework and the potential to earn college credit. When students complete a whole academic year's worth of rigorous coursework among the strongest students in the school, they benefit intellectually,

build subject-specific academic skills, and when they meet with success, they build their confidence that they will make stronger collegiate students. Secondly, students who score a 3 or higher on an AP test are potentially eligible for earning college credit. Even though colleges and universities are establishing higher thresholds for earning college credit resulting from AP exams, at the very least, students can avoid remedial college courses that delay progress toward their baccalaureate degree.

AP most benefits well-prepared students who pass AP exams. A National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2010) study that examined efforts to expand AP programs to benefit minority and low-income students found that taking AP courses alone is not related to college success. Taking AP courses and passing AP exams is what matters. Often, low income and minority students have low AP exam passing rates. The study notes that academic preparation in early grades is critical for AP readiness. Therefore, analyzing AP exam performance of underrepresented students in AP is an important concern that follows the issue of access to enroll in these courses. AP exam performance analysis is beyond the scope of this study. If academic intensity of a student's high school curriculum is most important to students' success in college (Adelman, 2006), then close investigation of high school course-taking practices is critically important.

Who is taking AP? The following national data is provided by the College Board in their "Opportunities for Underserved Students" report. In 2010, the number of seniors leaving high school having taken an AP exam was 853,314, and 508,818 (or 59.6%) of them scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. Low-

income students, according to the College Board, are those who qualify for a subsidy to help pay for an AP exam. In 2010, 179,774 low-income students took an AP exam and 84,135 (or 46.8%) of them scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. Thus, 21% of students who took an AP exam were low-income⁴ and they made up 17% of the students scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam.

Of the 441,946 Black students who were seniors in 2010, 73,270 took an AP exam and 19,675 of them scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. As such, Black⁵ students made up 9% of AP test takers and 4% of the students who scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP test. Sixty-three percent of Black students in the class of 2010 were female and 37% were male⁶. The AP tests Black students took most frequently were: English literature, English language, U.S. History, U.S. Government and Politics, and Psychology.

Of the 505,777 Latino students who were seniors in 2010, 136,717 students took an AP exam and 74,479 of them scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. So, 16% of students who took an AP test were Latino⁷, and they made up 15% of students who scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP test. Fifty-nine percent of Latinos in the class of 2010 were female and 41% were male. The AP tests Latino students took most frequently were: Spanish language, English language, English literature, U.S. History, and U.S. Government and Politics.

⁴ According to the U.S. Census, 15.3% of the U.S. population had income below their respective poverty level in 2010.

⁵ According to the U.S. Census, 13.6% of the U.S. population was Black or African American in 2010.

⁶ The disproportionate composition of males compared to females in African American and Latino subgroups in the class of 2010 is deeply concerning. The consideration of gender is not a variable for consideration in this dissertation but would be an important topic for future study.

⁷ According to the U.S. Census, 16.3% of the U.S. population was Hispanic or Latino in 2010.

AP Achievement Gap. In measuring equity and excellence, the College Board uses a formula that is calculated by the percentage of the graduating class of a particular race or ethnicity who score a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam divided by the percentage of that race or ethnicity in that graduating class. The quotient is expressed on a 100-point scale, with a score of 100 indicating that the state has achieved equity and excellence for that subgroup. It is important to note that by using the percentage of the *graduating* class, the success rate is inflated since dropouts are not included in the metric.

Using this equity and excellence measure, students of color are underperforming nationally and doing substantially worse in Pennsylvania. Across the United States in 2010, Black or African American students made up 14.6% of the graduating class, but only 3.9% Black students scored a 3 on at least one AP test. The equity and excellence score for Black students was 26.7. Disturbingly, Pennsylvania finished last out of all 50 states in their success with Black students on AP tests. While the percentage of Pennsylvania's 2010 graduates who were Black was 13.9%, just 2.0% scored a 3 or higher on an AP test, resulting in a 14.4 equity and excellence measure achieved for African American senior students.

Success for Latino or Hispanic students was also low but improving. For the United States as a whole, 16.8% of the graduating class of 2010 were Latino, 14.6% of successful AP examinees were Latino, resulting in 86.9 equity and excellence measure nationally for this subgroup. Pennsylvania performed very low with its Latino students, ranking 49 out of 50 states with this subgroup. Latinos made up 5.4% of the graduating class in Pennsylvania in 2010, but only 2.4% of them scored

a 3 or higher on an AP test. So, Pennsylvania registered a 44.4 excellence and equity score for its Latino students.

Overall, AP data show there are clear and substantial national racial inequities for students of color, and moreover, Pennsylvania is the lowest performing state in the nation when combining the test performance data of Black and Latino students. The College Board has an advocacy department that promotes equity. The fourth and final recommendation out of *The Educational Crisis Facing Young Men of Color* (2010) report is this: “The states, federal government and foundations should identify and scale up the most successful model programs designed to ensure the success of males of color by funding their replication and expansion.” While the examination of gender as a variable is beyond the scope of this study, the disparities in achievement among students of color, even more dramatically in Pennsylvania, deserve urgent attention in the interest of social justice.

The College Board’s position. The College Board has consistently advocated for access to and equity in AP courses. Of course, the College Board has a vested interest in more students taking their exams. While even taking the AP course without taking the national exam is a benefit to students (Hargrove, Godin & Dodd, 2008), the likelihood of college success is significantly stronger for AP students who score a 3 or higher (apreport.collegeboard.org; NAEP, 2010). The College Board began tracking AP test participation for low-income students beginning in 2006. From 2006 through 2010, the number of African American, Latino and low-income students taking at least one AP test has risen by 60%, 65%,

and 57%, respectively; and the number of students scoring a 3 or higher on at least one AP test has risen by 64%, 75%, and 64% respectively.

Beliefs of educators and principals. More schools are offering AP courses and opening access to more students to enroll in them. Education Week (2008) reported that more than 15% of high school seniors in 2007 took an AP exam. The mean score on those tests, though, dropped four years in a row, 2004-2008, as a wider range of students took these exams. The data also indicated widening score gaps for underrepresented racial and ethnic groups compared to the overall average.

Two recent dissertations have analyzed the beliefs of educators and principals, as their schools provided greater access to AP courses. King's dissertation (2010) was a 15-item Likert scale survey with one open-ended question responded to by 91 Seattle educators after district leaders lead efforts to open access to AP for non-traditional students. King drew four conclusions: Educators believe access to AP is important and beneficial to all students. Counselors and teachers have different perceptions of expectations for AP students. Educators do not support the idea of implementing policies of mandatory AP courses. Even though educators support open access to AP, they expect students to exhibit scholastic inclinations and maintain AP student norms, according to King.

Wood's (2010) dissertation used a questionnaire of 88 Chicago principals and found a link between leaders' awareness of equity in AP and their ability to promote equity. In addition to valuing AP course experience for their students, opening greater access to AP, and communicating that message, principals

expressed three concerns moving forward: attracting more students to AP courses, developing teachers' adaptability and commitment to AP expansion, and expecting and ensuring success for students in AP courses. This dissertation builds on the work of King and Wood.

Obstacles to enrolling in AP

With growing awareness and concern for equity regarding underrepresented students in advanced courses, educators and school leaders are increasingly expanding access to the rigors of AP. The following literature concerns the obstacles to increasing access to AP courses to more students.

The tracking debate. Oakes brought tracking into the open over 25 years ago and in the second edition of *Keeping Track* (2005) reflected,

If not exactly a ground swell or paradigm shift, this previously unquestioned regularity of schools [tracking], over a period of years, had become visible and subjected to pointed critique and action. Open discussions of privately observed injustices heightened the attention given to tracking. Tracking could no longer be seen as an equity-neutral, educationally well-advised school structure (p. ix).

Slowly, school leaders have been trying to devise more equitable course-taking practices to undo the problems inherent to tracking.

Loveless (1999), published by the Brookings Institution, takes opposition to Oakes and detracking. Loveless states that while schools formerly sorted students by IQ scores into vastly different curricula, track assignments are now based on multiple criteria such as successful completion of prerequisite courses, prior achievement, and teacher recommendations. "Public opinion research conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation shows broad support for tracking among teachers,

parents, and students. And yet, despite this popularity, and despite having shed much of its past rigidity and determinism, tracking generates fierce, protracted political conflict in communities across the nation” (pp. 1-2). As a result, Loveless emerged as the leading voice for preserving the status quo with respect to tracking.

Like Loveless, Oakes recognizes that the sorting of students is no longer tied to IQ scores; however, the idea of tracking students based on a normal curve is still real. “We really need to rethink whether this way of looking at human potential squares with recent and mounting evidence that, under appropriate instructional conditions, more than 90 percent of students can master course material” (Oakes, 2005, p. 11). Carnevale and Strohl (2010) write, “As social science and cognitive science prove more and more, individual educational success is, in substantial part, a social construct. Ability is for the most part developed, not innate. Quality education develops ability, but access to quality education is stratified by race, ethnicity, and class” (p. 82). Most simply, if effort is what makes you smart (Dweck, 2006), school leaders should push more students to take the toughest courses.

However, tracking remains a widespread practice and is generally considered legally acceptable. Courts have found that tracking is not intentionally discriminatory. Even when they have, Welner (2001) has found that the court-ordered resolutions have not been transformative at the school level, as local officials make minimal adjustments to meet court provisions.

Problems with tracking. Three kinds of information typically affect placement in different academic tracks: standardized test scores, teacher and counselor recommendations, and student and parent choice. “Negative assumptions

about the culture and dispositions of African Americans and Latino students shaped counselors' advice to students and teachers' recommendations for course placement—advice that works against students taking high-track classes” (Oakes, 2005, p. 250). Tatum (1997) cautions, “In today’s desegregated schools the models of success—the teachers, administrators, and curricular heroes—are almost always White” (pp. 65). Even if students are able to select their own program of study, inequitable patterns persist in upper level courses (Burriss and Garrity, 2008; Tyson, 2011). The adults inside and outside the school, plus the students themselves, fall into an institutional pattern of low expectations for students of color without leadership to the contrary.

Researchers like Oakes and Loveless frame the issue of tracking as a policy question, but also critically important is the perception of students. Since most tracking systems sort along racial lines, with African American and Latino students less likely to be in the honors track, the school system is sending a tacit message to students about who is smart and who is not. In racially diverse schools, many high-achieving students find themselves as “the only black” in their upper-level courses like AP (Tyson, 2011). Tatum (1997) interviewed one Black student about the irony of the segregation in his upper level classes – despite his being in an otherwise integrated school environment – and the identity issues it raised for him. The student reflected, “It was really a very paradoxical existence, here I am in a school that’s 35 percent Black, you know, and I’m the only Black in my classes...That always struck me as odd. I guess I felt that I was different from the other Blacks because of that” (p. 56). Not only do students of color who are in upper level classes in heavily

tracked schools have to work hard academically, but they often have to manage conflicted social relationships with their peers and make tough choices about their identity. Urrieta (2004) writes that mainstream education can be seen as “Whitestream,” with a hostile environment for any student who is a cultural minority in upper level classes. If students perceive upper level opportunities as closed to them, they will feel that hegemonic domination (Apple, 1979) is more powerful than the countervailing ethic of social justice, and therefore, resist schooling.

Oppositional culture. Students who do not trust that the school system is fair, often develop an oppositional disposition to school. Kohl (1994) states, “To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject their world” (p. 134). Such a choice leads to an oppositional social identity. Among Black teenagers, as controversially described by Fordham and Ogbu (1987), “To behave in the manner defined as falling within a white cultural frame of reference is to ‘act white’ and is negatively sanctioned” (p. 181) by many African American teens. Tatum (1997) frames it this way: “Doing well in school becomes identified as trying to be White. Being smart becomes the opposite of being cool” (p. 62).

Tyson concludes from her studies that the concept of acting white is greatly exaggerated, and furthermore, that the connections between race and achievement that students learn, they learn at school as a result of tracking practices that disproportionately sort students. “Students equate achievement with whiteness because school structures do” (Tyson, 2011, p. 6). The effect is that often students

will associate academic achievement with acting white, but, in fact, the cause for that association is the school's organization. Schools' academic tracks "can lead students to perceive their own and others' assigned placements as accurate and permanent. Indeed, students tend to believe that placements merely reflect racial differences in ability, work ethic, and attitudes toward school" (2011, p. 11). While the student perspective is beyond the scope of this study, adults in the school must be aware of how students perceive the school's climate and curriculum and how their perceptions may affect student aspirations and effort.

While Tyson analyzes the connection between racialized tracking and students associating achievement to whiteness, this study analyzes the role of influential school leaders and educators in promoting and supporting equity in AP course-taking. Tyson recommends: "Research on oppositional peer cultures and on student track placement must also pay greater attention to the racial composition of both schools and classrooms" (2011, p. 169). Building on this suggestion for further research, the first part of this dissertation will analyze racial composition of students taking AP courses in the high school that is the subject of this study. In addition, because educators at Lincoln referred to "acting white" as a factor shaping course-taking, their perspectives on this issue are considered in chapter four.

Other gate-keeping factors. While the widely institutional practice of tracking is greatly determinative of students' course-taking patterns, other finer gate-keeping processes are part of how high schools operate, affecting the courses students take. McIlroy's (2010) dissertation used critical race theory in analyzing why few students of color in New Mexico enrolled in AP courses. Two of the four

limiting factors were institutional: First was the failure of the school to develop an institutional value for equity and second was the inertia of institution-centered practices. If the processes and the adults in the school do not express advocacy for underrepresented students, those students are unlikely to take the risk to enroll in AP courses.

McIlroy's other two findings regard the lack of motivating interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. First, impersonal relationships between teachers and students of color characterized the schools in the study. Second, teacher negativity regarding the academic potential of students negatively affected students of color enrolling in AP courses. Personal relationships matter in motivating underrepresented students to take on the academic challenge of AP.

Inclusive practices to increase equity in AP

School leadership to address equity: A case study. As practitioners, Burris and Garrity (2008) were part of the leadership team at South Side High School in Rockville Centre School District on Long Island, New York, where they placed all students in a rich and accelerated curriculum. The results were dramatically improved Regents passing rates and a larger and more diverse International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Southside High School is a gold level school according to 2010 *U.S. News* qualifications. Based on their experience, Burris and Garrity recommend heterogeneous grouping to foster high academic achievement while diminishing racial and socioeconomic gaps. This study will build more directly on Burris and Garrity's work of increasing diversity in their IB

program. While detracking is one strategy for addressing equity in schools, this study is limited to racial and class equity in AP courses, not IB.

South Side High School's initial experience with detracking and open enrollment of its IB classes were not enough to make its upper level courses diverse by race and class. School leaders found they had to provide a safety net for students that included clusters of students of color in upper level classes, flexible academic support provided during the school day, and counseling that promoted the most challenging courses (Burris, et.al., 2007, p. 55). District leaders encouraged teachers to keep standards high and provided professional development in differentiating instruction. Teachers scaffolded materials, stressed writing, taught for depth over breadth, and graded on rubrics to help students produce high-quality work.

Researchers surveyed two groups of 25 students with matching PSAT scores from South Side's class of 2002; 88 percent of the students who took IB English and mathematics graduated college in four years, while only 32 percent of those who took either IB course finished in four years (Burris, et.al., p. 56). These data imply that while one upper-level course is good, a set of rigorous courses is more indicative of college completion. The authors conclude that South Side's underlying strategies—heterogeneous grouping, accelerated curriculum, support for teachers and struggling learners, and high expectations for all students—are likely to work for other schools to prepare their students for college (p.56). School leadership promoting equity and challenging coursework for all students promotes social mobility. This South Side High School example shows the importance of

understanding whether or not and how a school is able to create equity in its most demanding academic programs.

AVID. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is an “untracking” program started in San Diego and used nationally that has been shown to increase students’ own efficacy brought about by active participation in school and a belief in the power of schooling. AVID programs recruit students with high potential who are underperforming in school. Students in AVID maintain their ethnic identity while actively engaging in schooling (Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 2008). While “voluntary minority” students, i.e., immigrants, are more likely to adopt an achievement ideology in school,

The involuntary-minority students in AVID have developed an interesting set of beliefs about the relationship between school and success. They do not have a naïve belief in the connection between academic performance and occupational success. While they voice enthusiastic support for the power of their own agency, their statements also display a critical awareness of structures of inequality and strategies for overcoming discrimination in society (Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 2008, p. 543).

According to this study, AVID students are neither oppositional nor conformist but are successful in school while maintaining a critical consciousness. AVID students accommodate without assimilating, and manage dual identities with both academically oriented and not academically oriented friends (p. 549). The AVID program shows one way that schools can disrupt, rather than perpetuate, the social reproduction process.

Postuma’s (2010) dissertation, like McIlroy’s, found past and present gate-keeping practices in a California high school that restrict student access to AP courses. However, inclusive practices are gaining strength in the school that was

the focus of the study, and Postuma found that principles and practices of the AVID program have a positive effect on the number of underrepresented students taking AP classes. In this study, too, the practices of AVID had a positive effect on inclusive AP practices.

Separate support networks for underrepresented students. A separate social support network for Black students may help create a critical mass of African Americans in the highest academic classes in the school. A Boston-area suburban school introduced a Student Efficacy Training (SET) program that allowed bussed-in students from the city to meet daily as a group with two staff members with an aim of supporting these students through school challenges. Tatum (1997) analyzed the SET program:

It might seem counterintuitive that a school involved in a voluntary desegregation program could improve both academic performance and social relationships among students by *separating* [author's emphasis] the Black students for one period every day. But if we understand the unique challenges facing adolescents of color and the legitimate need they have to feel supported in their identity development, it makes perfect sense" (pp. 73-74).

A program called Black Scholars at Lincoln, which will be discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation, is built on principles similar to those of the SET program.

Following Ogbu's controversial study of Shaker Heights, Ohio, a Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars program was formed that was effectively student-run (McGovern, Davis & Ogbu, 2008). The MAC sought to build on three positive community forces: collective identity, peer pressure, and educational strategies to create a group of scholars. The scholars, including their ceremonies and awards, were to be the catalyst for making Black academic achievers visible in the school and community. The MAC program emphasized student skill

development in leadership, mentoring, and communication, not necessarily classroom skills. Those who studied the program (McGovern, Davis & Ogbu, 2008) pointed to the need to both change the school system, including curricula and teacher approaches, and change the community of students to internalize a belief in their own intelligence. The program's effectiveness could be further enhanced, the authors suggested, by incorporating tenets of this program into the routine activities of the school as a whole. Again, Black Scholars at Lincoln is similar.

Strivers. Undergraduate collegiate admissions departments are giving greater consideration for admission to applicants Kahlenberg (2010) calls "strivers," underprivileged high school students who achieve at higher measures than statistically expected. Carnevale and Strohl (2010) recommend that colleges reduce their reliance on SAT tests in favor of subject-specific achievement tests.

All education metrics are highly correlated with racial, ethnic, and SES differences to one degree or another. The justification for a shift toward achievement tests over the current ACT or SAT is that they send the right messages to all K-12 students, especially the least-advantaged students. The clear message that a switch to achievement tests would send is that studying in K-12 education matters in getting into college, especially getting into selective, elite colleges. Hitting the books would be the best test prep because the material covered in the textbooks is covered in the tests. College admissions testing would no longer be a high stakes game of tricky questions and beat the clock (p. 181).

AP tests are subject-specific tests that fit the recommendation Caravale and Strohl are making. Furthermore, AP participation increases the likelihood of completing college. Caravale and Strohl (2010) calculate that taking an A.P. class and completing college has a positive correlation of: .813, and taking an A.P. test as an additional factor: .691 (p. 186). These data indicate that taking an AP course and taking an AP test are positively correlated with obtaining a college degree. Such

evidence of the correlation between taking AP classes and college completion is further reason to make sure that underrepresented students participate in AP courses.

Since underrepresented students tend to come from families that lack experience in the most rigorous academic settings, the school is responsible for providing comprehensive support services to help these students be successful once they gain access to the most challenging curricula. Faculty mentoring, peer mentoring, academic monitoring, career development opportunities, and events that promote social connections constitute the comprehensive system of support services that are provided by the University of North Carolina's Covenant Scholars program (Fiske, 2010). Such range of supports should be considered by secondary school leaders in order to help more underrepresented students meet with success in upper level courses.

Like all people trying something new, high school students need to be pushed to take on new challenges and then be supported when they make the effort. "For all students, regardless of race, the most important consideration in course-selection deliberations is a desire to avoid failure and the feelings of incompetence and embarrassment that accompany that experience" (Tyson, 2011, p. 9). Issues related to support of students by inclusive AP teachers are discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Culture of caring. Instead of subtractive schooling in which students are considered from a deficit model, teachers, counselors, and administrators in high schools need to develop and express politically aware, authentic caring for their

students (Valenzuela, 2009) if they want to engage more students of color in school learning. If “teachers fail to forge meaningful connections with their students...the feeling that ‘no one cares’ is pervasive—and corrosive. Real learning is difficult to sustain in an atmosphere rife with mistrust” (Valenzuela, 2009, p. 5). School officials should make efforts to design the curricula to be more culturally relevant and not be a subtractive process (Valenzuela, 2009; Ogbu, 2008). An explicit culture of support communicated from the adults in the school to students from underrepresented groups is likely to change course-taking patterns.

Social class and mobility. The United States has less class mobility than is popularly believed. While the United States has a tradition and a reputation as a meritocracy, upward mobility in America since the 1980s has slowed to European levels (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). From post-World War II into the 1980s, while The flexible, fragmented, and forgiving American education system made the United States the global leader in democratizing education...The highly fragmented PreK-12 system led to wide differences in resources and quality [for underprivileged students] throughout the PreK-16 system, for example, results in lower student-teacher ratios, less counseling, and fewer student support services, all of which affect access to post-secondary education. (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010, p. 76)

Carnevale and Strohl warn that, “We are building a postsecondary system polarized by race, ethnicity, and class and a mismatch between resources and need” (p. 77). This mismatch represents a problem because it means that talent is being wasted. If we are to continue to see education as the key to upward mobility and consider America a meritocracy, we must do a better job of generating access to rigorous curricula for students in our secondary schools. Tyson (2011) makes a similar point: “By leaving racialized tracking unchallenged, we require some students to negotiate and devise strategies to minimize the fallout from a system that they

neither created nor consented to, a system that demonstrably determines winners and losers based on their race and class” (p. 172). A reasonable conclusion based on Tyson’s assertion is to reduce academic tracks and open access to upper level course work like AP.

In order to have an effective and fair secondary education system, we must pay simultaneous attention to equity and quality (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). Put more forcefully, as Burriss and Garrity (2008) conclude, “Without equity, how can a school ever *truly* be excellent?” [emphasis theirs] (p. 158).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

With ten years of experience studying segregation in advanced classes, Tyson's (2011) suggestions for practices to address inequity include detracking and examining current placement practices and criteria to assess whether and how they contribute to racialized patterns of course-taking. The high school that is the focus of this study has largely detracked its courses and reduced prerequisites to take AP courses, making it a promising site for analyzing equitable AP course taking. The school is also racially diverse (African American 46%, White 43%, Asian 7%, and Latino 4%) with nearly 20% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, according to 2009-10 data. Furthermore, *Newsweek* recognized this school as one of the Top 100 high schools in the nation in 2010 and the *Washington Post* recognized it in 2011 for students' high rate of participation and performance on AP tests. For these reasons, this school is a promising site for analyzing equity in AP courses.

This dissertation is designed to address the same issues as the McIlroy study (2010); those issues are the institutional and individual effects on equity in AP course-taking. But instead of using critical race theory, this study provides a different perspective to the McIlroy study, taking the practitioners' vantage point to analyze how the school's structure of the course-selection process and how school administrators, teachers and counselors can positively influence equity enrollment in AP courses.

The principal focus of this study is to describe and analyze to what extent and how one diverse, inner-ring public high school is providing equitable access to

its AP courses. This dissertation is a case study that uses both qualitative and quantitative data. The research is broken into two parts. The first will consist of a record review to answer “to what extent” the school is providing equity in AP courses. After the record review, I collected data through face-to-face interviews to further answer “to what extent” but more importantly to answer “how” the school is providing equity in AP courses.

This study describes the AP course-taking data in the studied high school. Each AP course is analyzed by counting the number of students of color and economically disadvantaged students who take that AP course; the percentages of students of these subgroups are compared to the percentages of students in the school as a whole. While I did review AP exam performance, I chose not to feature this data in the interviews with the subjects who participated in this study so that our conversations would focus on which students were taking AP courses instead of students’ performances on AP exams. Further research could usefully examine AP exam performance in a diversifying setting like Lincoln.

Important to note is that this study is not aiming to describe students’ direct experiences and perspectives regarding AP classes. This study builds on the thread of literature that focuses on school leadership to provide access to rigorous curricula for a more diverse set of students; it does not involve students directly, but does examine the impact of school practices on students through an analysis of their course-selection patterns.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data – Race, Class and AP Enrollment

I was granted access to the school district database to answer the “to what extent” part of my research question by analyzing AP class enrollment, AP exam participation, and AP exam results over a five-year period. This dataset spans five years, 2006-2011. I analyzed student participation by race and class (SES), and compared this to the demographics of the school as a whole, which will provides an answer to subquestion 1: Are the students taking AP courses and tests reflective of the racial and SES school demographics as a whole?⁸

Students are already coded by race by the College Board; class, however, is more sensitive. I was granted permission from school officials to total the number of students on free or reduced lunch participating in each AP course. Throughout the study, students were tracked by an identification number, not by name, to protect their confidentiality. Participants did not see student names at any time in the course of this study.

Qualitative Data – Perceptions of Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators

The aim of the interviews was to uncover what is working to promote equity and what the challenges are part of that effort, according to the perspective of each interviewee. The interview protocol used is attached as Appendix A. I scheduled interviews with the school’s leading educators to answer the “how” part of my

⁸ While I provided AP exam results for review by the subjects in this study, I chose not to include those scores in my final analysis, instead choosing to focus on AP course enrollment, as that was the focus of my interviews.

research question. I began with a small, purposive sample and used conceptual sampling based on the references of interviewees until I reached a saturated sample. In total, I interviewed nineteen educators in the course of this study.

I interviewed administrators who affect academic affairs and those recognized as having an influential role in shaping the culture of the school. I interviewed a sample of counselors, several of whom have track records of counseling underrepresented students into AP courses. I interviewed AP teachers, many of whom have had success with a diverse set of students in their classes based on the archive review.

I used a snowball sampling methodology, such that at the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee who they thought I should interview next for the purpose of informing my study. My aim was to speak with the influential people who are effective at helping to get more students of color and low SES into and succeeding in AP classes. Interviews with school administrators, counselors, and teachers provided the data for explaining what the adults in the school are doing to promote a diverse group of students to take AP courses. I also interviewed teachers who had relatively lower rates of diversity enrollment in their classes. These teachers with low diversity enrollment were chosen based on analysis of AP participation nationally relative to low participation at Lincoln and based the reflections of the initial set of interviewees.

I interviewed nineteen (19) subjects for this study, including three (3) administrators, three (3) counselors, and thirteen (13) teachers, fitting with my design proposal in which I expected to conduct a total of 16-20 interviews. The

interviews lasted roughly one hour each in duration. I used member checks to provide opportunities for key participants in this study to comment on my findings. As themes began to emerge, I had follow-up conversations with participants who commented more extensively on emerging themes in their initial interviews to inform them of the data trend and ask for their clarification. These member checks helped refine my analysis and conclusions.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the course of the record review of Lincoln's AP enrollment and AP exam performance data were compared roughly to the College Board's national and state data. The College Board has established an equity measure by which subgroups are compared to the national percentage of all senior students who score a 3 or higher on at least one AP test. I also considered Lincoln's data on students' AP exam performance data from the state of Pennsylvania as a whole.

I employed a similar equity measure as the College Board but instead of looking for students who scored a 3 or higher on one or more AP exam, I applied the equity measure to each AP course, initially for both course enrollment and for AP exam success, and ultimately limited the analysis to AP course enrollment. For example, if class composition of the AP English Literature course in the final year of data collection was comprised of 46% African American, 4% Latino, and 20% low-income, then the course would score 100 on the equity measure since these percentages are the same as they are for the student body as a whole.

Interview data were transcribed, analyzed, and coded to generate themes that provided a thorough description of the course-taking process. Analysis of qualitative data is an inductive process; the coded categories emerged through examination of the transcribed interview data. I analyzed the data as I collected it, using a constant comparative method (see, for example, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From each transcription, I generated condensed notes, reviewing these notes for trends. Critical comments related to segregation in race and gender, teacher's expectations of non-traditional AP students, flexibility in instruction and assessment, perceptions regarding "acting white" and Black Scholars for example began to emerge and take shape. I highlighted insightful quotes related to these themes. I arranged participants' direct quotes into categories and from there transitioned from coding to writing. A full and detailed description and analysis of the course-taking process emerged through the perspectives of multiple interviewees in combination with the quantitative data.

While generalizing from a single case study is unwarranted, this study has generated a holistic explanation of AP course-taking at Lincoln HS. The findings from this dissertation may point to implications for organizational policy and practice in other high schools and perhaps broaden theory on equity in secondary education.

Ethical Issues

I have had a close relationship to the school that is the site of this study. I was the social studies department chairperson for five years at the school before

leaving in 2009 to become an elementary principal in the same school district. In 2012, I returned as to the school as the principal. I have since left the school district for employment with another district.

I have personal and professional relationships with many of the interview subjects in this study. In my role as department chair, I opened access to and substantially increased participation in AP courses, teaching three different AP courses myself. I have a vested interest in the school district moving forward with increasing equity in course taking for all students. My relationship with the subjects and my professional bias in favor of increased access to AP certainly have had some effect on my data collection. As I noted in the previous chapter, “One does not go into the field to ‘see’—one goes to ‘look’ for various sorts of patterns and themes” (Anyon, 2009, p. 4). I was looking for pockets of success for students who traditionally would have been shut out of AP courses. Beginning with quantitative course enrollment data provided participants and me with a numerical vantage point for trends of increased equity for such students.

In moving from the course enrollment data to interviews, I followed the semi-structured interview protocol attached in Appendix A to attempt to mitigate my bias. To ensure interview subjects that their participation is voluntary, they were told verbally and in the informed consent form, attached as Appendix B: “You are free to participate or not, or leave the study at any time without penalty. You can refuse to answer any questions that is asked of you.” Appendix C is the permission form for permission to audiotape. After each interview, I sent each interviewee a thank you note but no other compensation or recognition.

Although I did not involve students directly in this study, as stated earlier, I did have access to student performance data and free and reduced lunch records. To protect student confidentiality, I immediately coded student information on site by identification number, not by name.

Positionality. At the outset of each interview, I explained to my interview subjects that while I have played various leadership roles in the district, I was strictly in the role of researcher through the course of this study. This defined boundary was maintained without issue for the majority of my interviews, but there were instances during which participants questioned the dual role I realistically maintained as a school administrator while being the researcher conducting this study.

For example, when speaking with a math teacher, as the interviewer I stated that some consider Statistics “the easier AP,” a comment that was made by a previous subject. The math teacher questioned me, asking if this comment was crossing into the evaluative role. I clarified that the comment had been made by a previous interviewee and that the AP Statistics course had one of the largest diversity of enrollment among the school’s AP courses. I reminded the participant that he could withdraw his consent to participate in this study at any time. The teacher seemed to calm quickly with these clarifications. Throughout this study I remained cognizant of my positionality relative to my subjects, and in this instance was able to reestablish my role as researcher soon after the question arose. In the course of interviews, I made statements regarding the inherent dilemmas and

complexities of increasing access to a wider set of students to mitigate their possible perception of me as pro-inclusion.

As I reviewed the quantitative data on AP course enrollment during one interview, the teacher blushed when he reviewed the data for his course because his course had very few students of color or low SES enrolled. I perceived that he did not want to be seen as a person who is against inclusion and equity. At that point, I clarified that I would be using pseudonyms in the writing and publication of this study. Little more was said on the topic and we continued with the interview apparently without this moment affecting more of our exchange, though later in the interview the teacher pointed to a more recent trend of increased diversity in his course that was beyond the scope of this study. It seemed to me that sharing this teacher's data relative to other AP courses in the school did cause some embarrassment for him, as evidenced by his physiological reaction to the data. In this case, the data affected the teacher and triggered some reflection regarding equity in his course.

In another instance, I had been involved in a disciplinary action against one of the subjects who participated in this study. The disciplinary incident was not specifically addressed directly by either the subject or by me during the course of our interview. As with all interviewees, I was sure to make my statement at the outset that my role in this study was strictly that of researcher. The disciplinary matter that had nothing to do with equity in AP course-taking; however, it did provide some level of subtext to our discussion, simply because neither of us could

simply forget that in practice I maintained a supervisory position in practice even though I was in the role of researcher in this study.

Throughout this study, I kept a formal distance with the participants. It was a delicate matter. While I was an administrator at the school at the time of the interviews, when I proposed this study and at the point of data analysis, I was not an administrator at the school. Of course, my role as department chairperson and as principal had some effect on participants' responses to my questions, but I do think that I was able to convey successfully to the participants that my intent was to maintain a researcher's neutrality in the process of gaining understanding about how AP course-selection works at both the school level and at the interpersonal level.

As an educator, I want to see more diversity in AP courses. My disposition, I must admit, has some negative effect on my view of AP courses that have few non-traditional students enrolled. Throughout this study, particularly during analysis of the data, I was careful to guard against overly harsh conclusions of the most homogeneous AP courses and the teachers of those courses.

Overall, while my administrative positions in the school and school district over the course of this study certainly affected the process, when moments of question arose during interviews, I immediately redefined my role as researcher. I remained vigilant throughout data collection, analysis, and writing phases of this dissertation to attempt to minimize the effect of my positionality on the findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE DATA

In this chapter, I will review the quantitative data on national and local AP course and exam participation. First, I will review AP course exams taken most nationally by students of color. Second, I will review AP course-taking data by students of color and those of low socioeconomic status at Lincoln HS. These quantitative data inform the qualitative data that follow in chapter five of this dissertation.

National AP exam-taking data

Before returning to the research question as it applies to Lincoln HS, looking at national AP enrollment preferences provides helpful context. In Table 1, below, is the list of AP courses taken most by students of color nationwide.

Table 1

AP Exams Taken Most Nationally by Students of Color⁹

African American students

- 1 English Literature
- 2 English Language
- 3 United States History
- 4 Government and Politics: United States
- 5 Psychology

Latino students

- 1 Spanish Language
- 2 English Language
- 3 English Literature
- 4 United States History
- 5 Government and Politics: United States

⁹ Data from College Board, “Opportunities for underserved students”

If Lincoln HS were to follow these national trends, we should expect to see similar enrollment patterns in the Lincoln data. These data sets are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Before moving to the Lincoln AP course enrollment data, we need to note the overall percentages of students of color and students of low socioeconomic status who attend Lincoln HS.

Table 2

Percentages of Students of Color and of Students of Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) at Lincoln HS

Year	Students of Color	Students of Low SES
2007-08	43.2	6.4
2008-09	45.9	9.4
2009-10	48.7	13.8
2010-11	50.7	17.8
2011-12	51.8	19.9

These data reveal a 20% increase in students of color enrolled in the school over five years at Lincoln HS. The increase in students of low socioeconomic status over these five years was 211%. Such demographic shifts, though not uncommon for inner-ring suburbs, can dramatically change elements of the culture of the school, including upper level course enrollment.

The table on the subsequent page are the data of AP course enrollment at Lincoln over these same five years. At the same time that the demographics of Lincoln’s student population were becoming more diverse with regard to students of color and with regard to students of low socioeconomic status, AP course enrollment was increasing, as Table 3 shows.

Table 3

AP Course Enrollment by Number of students in the course (n), Number of Students of Color (SOC), and by Number of Students of Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) at Lincoln HS

Course	2011-12			2010-11			2009-10		
	n	SOC	SES	n	SOC	SES	n	SOC	SES
Biology	71	29	9	31	14	3	31	5	2
Calc AB	20	4	2	19	3	2	23	6	2
Calc BC	36	5	2	37	1	2	36	6	1
Chemistry	23	11	2	22	3	2	38	14	0
Eng Lang	26	5	1	24	4	0	0	0	0
Eng Lit	72	9	5	50	8	1	38	1	0
Environ	51	11	5	48	9	5	36	10	4
Euro Hist	30	3	0	34	3	1	30	1	0
French	9	0	2	10	3	1	13	3	0
German	12	4	0	5	0	1	10	0	0
Gov: Comp	6	2	1	0	0	0	16	1	1
Gov: US	11	4	1	0	0	0	31	9	3
H Geog	26	6	0	33	4	2	7	2	0
Latin	9	1	0	7	1	0	4	0	0
MacroEc	41	6	6	0	0	0	15	1	0
MicroEc	11	1	1	0	0	0	16	3	0
Music Th	18	4	0	24	2	2	19	3	0
Physics B	12	8	2	19	10	1	25	8	1
Physics C: E&M	7	0	1	8	0	0	6	0	0
Physics C: M	37	3	4	30	5	1	24	4	1
Psychology	93	29	8	100	38	10	69	30	4
Spanish	12	1	2	26	8	2	12	2	1
Statistics	55	16	6	25	4	1	55	6	2
Studio Art	8	0	0	4	1	0	2	0	0
Studio Art: 3D	2	1	0	3	1	0	4	0	0
US History	46	5	3	46	9	3	83	13	5
World Hist	38	3	1	35	3	4	49	5	4
TOTAL	782	171	64	640	134	44	692	133	31

Table 3 (continued)

AP Course Enrollment by Number of students in the course (n), Number of Students of Color (SOC), and by Number of Students of Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) at Lincoln HS

Course	2008-09			2007-08		
	n	SOC	SES	n	SOC	SES
Biology	27	6	0	16	6	0
Calc AB	42	7	0	29	5	0
Calc BC	24	2	0	37	4	0
Chemistry	6	2	0	8	1	0
Eng Lang	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eng Lit	51	6	1	56	5	1
Environ	49	7	0	25	2	0
Euro Hist	30	0	0	69	9	0
French	14	5	1	12	3	1
German	10	0	0	28	4	0
Gov: Comp	15	1	1	17	3	1
Gov: US	23	4	3	36	7	3
H Geog	0	0	0	0	0	0
Latin	6	0	0	5	0	0
MacroEc	0	0	0	0	0	0
MicroEc	13	3	0	9	2	1
Music Th	0	0	1	0	0	0
Physics B	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physics C: E&M	2	0	1	4	0	1
Physics C: M	25	1	0	27	3	0
Psychology	27	4	0	0	0	0
Spanish	15	4	0	12	1	0
Statistics	26	4	1	14	1	1
Studio Art	4	0	0	11	1	0
Studio Art: 3D	0	0	0	0	0	0
US History	59	8	1	87	5	1
World Hist	31	6	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	499	70	10	502	62	10

Over the span of these five years, Lincoln had a 55.8% increase in overall AP course enrollment. There was a 175.8% increase in AP enrollment by students of color and a 540% increase in AP enrollment by students of low socioeconomic status. Clearly something is working here so that even during a time of significant demographic change, AP course enrollment at Lincoln has been increasing, particularly for non-traditional AP students. Table 4 is a list of AP courses at Lincoln HS with course enrollment greater than 10 students ranked by combined equity scores for students of color and low SES.

Table 4

Percent enrollment and equity of Students of Color (SOC) and of Students of Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) in AP courses at Lincoln HS in 2011-12 where n>10

Course	<i>n</i>	Percent SOC	Equity	Percent SES	Equity
schoolwide		51.8		19.9	
Physics B	12	66.7	100.0	16.7	83.9
Chemistry	23	47.8	92.3	8.7	43.7
Biology	71	40.8	78.7	12.7	63.8
Spanish	12	8.3	32.2	16.7	83.9
Gov: US	11	36.4	70.3	9.1	45.7
Statistics	55	29.1	56.2	10.9	54.8
Psychology	93	31.1	60.0	8.6	43.2
MacroEc	41	14.6	28.1	14.6	73.3
Environ	51	21.6	41.7	9.8	49.2
Calc AB	20	20.0	38.6	10.0	50.3
Physics C: M	37	8.1	15.6	10.8	54.3
German	12	33.3	64.2	0.0	0.0
MicroEc	11	9.1	17.6	9.1	45.7
Eng Lit	72	12.5	24.1	6.9	34.7
Eng Lang	26	19.2	37.1	3.8	19.1
Calc BC	36	13.9	26.8	5.6	28.1
US History	46	10.9	21.0	6.5	32.7
H Geog	26	23.1	44.6	0.0	0.0
Music Th	11	22.2	42.8	0.0	0.0
World Hist	38	7.9	15.2	2.6	13.1
Euro Hist	30	10.0	19.3	0.0	0.0
AP total	782	21.9	42.3	8.2	41.2

Unpacking Table 4 in context reveals important details. Physics B is a course that does not require calculus so students with weaker math skills are eligible for that course. Chemistry and Biology have high rates of diverse enrollment, though Biology has nearly three times as many students. Like Biology, Statistics and Psychology have large and diverse enrollments, demonstrating their popularity across the student body. Macroeconomics, Environmental Science and Physics C: Mechanics have moderately diverse enrollments relative to other courses at Lincoln. Calculus BC is perhaps the most rigorous course in the school due the challenging mathematics and applied theory that is inherent in the course content; Calculus BC is unlikely to be a course that non-traditional AP students would first consider. Spanish, US Government, German, Microeconomics, and Music Theory have low enrollments so a student or two has a large effect on percentage enrollments in these courses. Human Geography is primarily a ninth grade course, World History is primarily a tenth grade course, and European History seems to have little draw for nontraditional AP students. English Literature, English Language, and US History are the three courses that lag behind expectations when considering that these three courses, according to the national AP data, are among the five most popular courses for African American and Latino students.

Returning to the research question, these numbers provide answers to these two questions: To what extent does a high achieving, diverse high school provide equity in AP course enrollment? And, are the students taking AP courses reflective of the racial and SES school demographics as a whole? In 2011-12 the final year of data collection for this study, 21.9% of the students enrolled in AP courses were

students of color while students of color made up 51.8% of the overall school student enrollment, so not quite half of the proportional equivalent to the whole student body (42.3 equity). In the final year of data collection, 8.2% of students enrolled in AP courses qualified for free or reduced lunch, while 19.9% of the students school-wide qualified for free or reduced lunch. Again, the comparative data show that not quite half of the proportional equivalent to the whole student body were enrolled in AP courses (41.2 equity). However, in the first year that data was collected in this study, just 12.4% of students in AP courses were students of color and 2.0% were students of low socioeconomic status, compared to 43.2% (28.7 equity) and 6.4% (31.3 equity) respectively of the whole school population in the 2007-08 data. AP course enrollment has increased over these five years, both in real numbers and in proportional numbers.

Understanding the relative enrollment in different AP courses at Lincoln is critical to understanding students' course-taking patterns. Table 5 shows the most highly subscribed courses by number of non-traditional students at Lincoln in 2011-12.

Table 5

AP Courses Taken Most by Students of Color and Low SES at Lincoln HS, 2011-12

- 1 Biology
- 2 Psychology
- 3 Statistics
- 4 Environmental Science
- 5 English Literature

AP courses that were most popular nationally among students of color (see Table 2) that are not among the most highly subscribed at Lincoln are: English Language, United States History, and Government and Politics: United States.

Be reminded that, as described in chapter 1, Lincoln HS eliminated its lowest academic track in 2007-08 and opened enrollment to honors and AP courses beginning with the 2009-2010 school year. This five-year data set shows that some courses, notably Biology, Psychology, and Statistics, have become more diverse by race and class. Despite their popularity nationally, English and US History courses are relatively less subscribed. The quantitative data presented in this chapter provide context for the detailed investigation regarding what is happening at Lincoln that has created a comprehensive surge, as well as particular pockets of success, in diversifying AP enrollment. Those details are reported in the following chapter, an analysis of the qualitative data.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE DATA

While this study is a mixed methods study, the quantitative data presented in the previous chapter serve principally to provide a backdrop for the qualitative data and analysis in this chapter. The quantitative data provides an answer to the following questions: To what extent does Lincoln HS provide equity in AP course-taking? Are the students taking AP courses reflective of the racial and SES school demographics as a whole? The qualitative data in this chapter provides an answer to the most important and overarching question: How does Lincoln HS provide equity in AP course-taking? Also addressed in this qualitative chapter are answers to the following two sub-questions: What are the ways that adults in the school prepare, recruit and support students from underrepresented groups in the AP program? What are the obstacles or challenges in providing an equitable AP program?

In this chapter, I will argue that institutional structures and influential educators shape students' AP course-taking patterns. This chapter is organized into five major sections: 1. Conditions prior to open enrollment. 2. Institutional structures that facilitate AP enrollment for a diverse set of students. 3. Topics of discussion related to equity in AP at Lincoln. 4. Conflicting views on equity: Resistant or progressive. 5. Equity in practice.

In the first section, I will describe the conditions at Lincoln HS prior to open enrollment. Here, I describe the organizational structure and culture of the school prior to any significant equity initiatives at the school. Understanding this recent

history is critical to understanding how educators in the school respond to the equity initiatives.

Second, I will address the groundwork that the school administration put in place in order to create an open environment for students to choose their own courses, free of gate-keepers. Lincoln HS provides twenty-nine different AP courses from which students could choose, and the school created a Black Scholars program that generated recognition for African American students who were demonstrating strong academic performance, which in turn, created positive peer pressure for taking challenging courses among Black students. Most important, the school administration allowed open enrollment for AP courses for any student who was interested in taking an AP course; open enrollment was the critical administrative action that shifted the school away from a system of strict prerequisites that relied heavily on standardized test scores and teacher recommendations. Open enrollment and positive peer pressure among students of color made Lincoln's many and varied AP courses more diverse.

Third, I will consider important topics that my subjects discussed related to equity in AP at their high school, including the challenges of open enrollment and the struggle to incorporate non-traditional AP students into those courses.

Following is a discussion of AP courses like upper-level math courses that need a pipeline of students with prerequisite skills in order to participate in those courses. Other AP courses, that theoretically almost any high school student could take, do not require such necessary skill sequences. This section further shows that guidance counselors play a critical role in shaping students' course enrollment and,

by extension, encouraging non-traditional AP students to enroll in AP courses. The question of academic support for non-traditional students in AP courses is also considered in this section.

Fourth, I will turn to what influential educators at Lincoln HS think regarding their roles and responsibilities with respect to increasing and supporting the enrollment of students of color in their classes – and what they say and do to either encourage non-traditional AP students to take their course or to intimidate such students from taking their AP course. Through my analysis of educators’ thoughts, words, and actions with respect to nontraditional AP students, two categories of teachers emerge: those who rigidly hold student accountable for failing to have formal rigorous preparation for their AP course and those who recruit and support non-traditional students who take their AP course.

Fifth and finally, I will describe equity in practice through the eyes of educators who are both explicitly caring and flexible in how they speak to and engage with non-traditional AP students. These are the hallmarks of the most successful inclusive educators at the school. As this study aims to shed light on pockets of success in promoting equity in AP, this final section advances that aim.

Conditions prior to open enrollment

Before analyzing the role that institutional structures and influential educators play in affecting course enrollment for a diverse set of students at Lincoln HS, it is necessary to assess the conditions prior to open enrollment. The organizational culture of the school prior to open enrollment was characterized by

tracking, gate keepers (see Oakes, 2005) and varied cultural and social capital (see Lareau, 1987). The subjects interviewed in the course of this study took quite a bit of time comparing Lincoln's organizational culture before and after open enrollment. Teachers had much greater control over which students were granted access to honors and AP courses prior to open enrollment. Some teachers lamented their loss of control over which students could sign up for their classes after AP courses were opened up to everyone. This institutional history, it turns out, has important bearing on how teachers approached prospective students once open enrollment became practice.

Tracking. Tracking requires sorting by the school system. Mr. Irving described course enrollment at Lincoln HS: "Years ago, in-house testing was definitely highly biased and subjective. LHS had a spirit of independence but it was also exclusive, too. Tracking began in the very, very early grades." At Lincoln HS, student achievement data on standardized tests was a beginning step for sorting students. In-house high school entrance tests, as Mr. Irving described, were exceptionally challenging and were subjective in the sense that students did not know what would be on those in-house tests. The local tests were more about being generally well-read and practiced in the discipline of that subject area but they were not standards-based. Instruction in those upper level courses was also locally controlled. According to Mr. Irving: "Years ago here it was like a college-level lecture, very impersonal attitude. And I don't think that's the way it is here now at all." The local curriculum, at the control of the department and the department chairperson, made entrance into the most rigorous courses exceptionally difficult to

gain access to, which had the effect of making those most rigorous courses elitist. The process of gaining access to honors and AP courses was amorphous, leaving most students and families excluded from such courses and wondering how to gain enrollment to the courses that would best prepare them for success in college.

Gate keepers. Prior to open enrollment, educators were put into position to act as gate keepers. Teacher recommendations, according to Ms. Nelson: “were based on past performance not on potential.” In practice, the school system had the effect of being resistant to students who wanted to “move up” to more rigorous courses because the onus was on students to prove to their teachers that they were thoroughly prepared for the course for which they sought entrance. Teachers wanted to be sure that students they recommended did well in upper-level courses and so were often reluctant to recommend students to move up.

Some subjects in this study voiced concern about discouraging conversations between educators and students who wished to move up to more challenging courses. Ms. Leaf said, “Previously, recommendations and comments deterred students of color [from honors and AP enrollment].” The school system, according to Ms. Leaf had the effect of making non-traditional students feel like unwelcome outsiders when they asked to enroll in AP courses. Mr. Irving stated, “In some cases, students of color feel discouraged from taking AP, [causing them to ask] ‘Is it because of my race?’” According to Mr. Irving, not only were students kept out of AP courses but they also suffered psychological setback—doubt about their fair place in the school system.

More than “gate keepers,” one teacher considered some influential educators in the old enrollment process to be “blockers” to non-traditional students moving into AP courses. In choosing to use the word “blocker,” this teacher Ms. Leaf is in the same philosophical camp as those who are most critical of tracking and its effects – that is that the school is systematically denying academic opportunity to those students who are not traditionally in upper level courses (see, for example, Oakes, 2005; Burriss and Garrity, 2008). Such students are disproportionately students of color and students of low socioeconomic status.

Some teachers, though, were active in trying to make the school more equitable in its upper-level courses. Here is an exchange between Mr. Cedar and the researcher, with the researcher asking the questions and Mr. Cedar providing answers:

Q: So when you have “gatekeepers” what you need are active people in the system to...

A: Push.

Q: To push. And that’s what you were describing earlier.

A: Yes. Now that open enrollment is here, students feel *empowered*. [his emphasis]

Mr. Cedar is describing what he and a few other progressive educators at the school tried to do within the school system in an era of tracking and gatekeepers. Ms. Leaf stated that the former principal and at least one counselor took their own actions in moving students up.

Despite their commitment, such initial efforts did not change the organizational culture of the school.

Varied cultural and social capital. Parents' cultural capital – the knowledge of how the school system works – and social capital – their relationships with influential decision makers – were critical components to the operation of the school prior to open enrollment (see Lareau, 2003). Educators at Lincoln, through this study, reported a substantial difference in how different kinds of parents interacted with the school system for the purpose of gaining course enrollment in a preferred track. Those parents who understood how placement decisions were made and who could make the decision would leverage their cultural and social capital within the school system to the benefit of their child in order to gain access to the most challenging courses. Such a dynamic fits with Lareau's (2003) findings that results in a "personalized education" for their children and a "generic education" for others.

Parents who wanted their child in honors or AP courses would aim to convince the teachers and department chairpersons to make a positive recommendation for upper-level courses; if that did not work, those parents would request multiple appeals trying to get the answer they sought – access to honors and AP courses. Such leverage of cultural capital fits with extant research on parents and school. For example, according to Lareau (1987), "Teachers at [a middle-class school] mentioned numerous cases in which parental involvement was unhelpful. In these cases, parents had usually challenged the professional expertise of the teachers" (p. 77). Such activism was generally the province of those parents with knowledge of school processes and influential connections, often to the frustration of teachers and counselors.

Consistent with Lareau's research, several teachers at Lincoln stated they did not appreciate parents who agitated against their recommendations. Some stated that the school was often successful at keeping those students out of honors and AP courses. As Lareau & Horvat (1999) found, teachers expect that "parents should accept the teacher's definition of their children's educational and social performance" (p. 43). These Lincoln HS educators were reluctant to relinquish their role as gate keepers through their use of teacher recommendations to upper level coursework.

Families with less cultural capital had much less understanding about the critical role that teacher recommendations and appeals had on course-placement – and the quality of the overall education – that their child would experience at Lincoln. Previous to open enrollment, "Some [white] families were able to maneuver....African American families generally didn't know all the avenues," stated Mr. Irving. Ms. Phillips reflected a similar perspective regarding Lincoln HS: "Some parents are extremely proactive; others are high-school grads and leave the decisions and placement to professionals at the school." As Lareau (1987) stated, working class parents "depended on the teacher to educate their children" (p. 79). The effect of disproportionate distribution of cultural capital at Lincoln was that students of color from less-educated families lacked access to upper-level courses that white students whose families understood the organizational culture did not.

With open enrollment, control over course enrollment flipped from educators with positional power and savvy parents willing to challenge initial course placements to the students themselves. A course enrollment system of

tracking, gate keepers and variation in cultural and social capital was traded for a system based on student choice. Mr. March noted that after open enrollment, “It’s kind of flipped. Now instead of the teacher holding the cards, the student does.” Some educators applauded open enrollment, while other educators lamented the loss of institutional control regarding which students could take the school’s most rigorous courses. Open enrollment to AP courses, by flipping power to the students, has a potentially powerful effect on equity in the organizational culture of a high school. Students who choose to take on the most rigorous preparation for college can do so, and they don’t have to beg those in positions of power to grant them access.

Institutional structures that facilitate AP enrollment for a diverse set of students

In order to provide more opportunities for nontraditional AP students at Lincoln HS, the school administration took two foundational actions and a final critical step that opened AP enrollment to any motivated student. The school added a variety of AP courses bringing the total up to 29; with so many AP choices, the school was no longer characterized by a single, elite cohort of the top students. A Black Scholars program was founded that recognized and celebrated academic achievement among African American students; the effect of this program, though somewhat controversial, was to create positive peer pressure for the students in Black Scholars and to inspire other students of color to aspire to higher levels of academic achievement. Finally, the school allowed for open enrollment to all AP

courses. The practice of open enrollment replaced school-controlled tracking with student choice. Each of these three steps was critical institutional steps for promoting equity in AP course-taking at Lincoln HS.

Step 1. Twenty-nine AP course options

As of 2007-08, Lincoln High School offered 29 different AP courses. With so many courses available to the student body, no single cohort of students can take all these advanced courses. The effect is that instead of a pyramid of students arranged with the very top students taking the most challenging courses, a flatter set of rigorous courses are available to a wider set of students. More students have been encouraged to take an AP course and, according to the teachers, counselors and administrators interviewed in this study, students reportedly feel less like outsiders walking into a classroom with the school's most ambitious students.

Due to the increase in AP course offerings over multiple years, students are not pigeon-holed. With a wide variety of courses, teachers need to recruit if they want their course to fill with students, said Mr. March. Ms. Harris echoed the strength of the wide AP course offerings: "We need to make them aware [of AP] as 9th graders. Stress 'Just challenge yourself!' At least one of these courses will catch a kid's interest." One of the counselors echoed the same sentiment as Ms. Harris, saying her approach with students is, "With 29 AP courses, spread your wings, have a taste!" Mr. Irving stated that while Lincoln HS offers a wide set of AP courses, a lot of city schools offer a limited number of AP courses, which could skew national enrollment data to the most typical required courses like AP Literature and US

History. At Lincoln HS, though, so many options for students means that they can sign up for the AP course or courses that most interest them.

This very wide set of AP course offerings has had the effect of dispersing academic rigor over numerous subject areas with a variety of teachers and their corresponding unique instructional approaches. Students, according to the participants in this study, perceived a wider set of opportunities due to variety in the curricular offerings. Greater diversity in course offerings has led to greater diversity in the students who take AP courses.

Step 2. Black Scholars and the African American student experience

Black Scholars is an honor society at Lincoln HS that recognizes and supports academic achievement for African American students (see, for example, Tatum, 1997, for analysis of the SET program in Massachusetts; McGovern, Davis & Ogbu, 2008, regarding study of the MAC program in Ohio). Black Scholars provides scaffolding for positive academic peer pressure. Black Scholars was intended to be a feeder for the National Honor Society, said Ms. Owens. The effort to create cultural momentum for academic achievement among African American students – through Black Scholars – played an important element in the development of Lincoln’s increased diverse enrollment in AP courses.

A complementary factor to Black Scholars was having African American teachers teach some of the AP courses. Having African American teachers for three AP courses is an indication to students of color that they can be intellectuals, according to Mr. Irving. Mr. Edwards also noted that having “African Americans

teaching AP classes creates a perception – an environment of support for them [African American students] stepping out.” African American teachers of AP courses, in addition to Black Scholars, helped create an environment that high academic achievement for Black students in the school was normal and expected.

Several participants pointed to the importance of ensuring a critical mass of students of color in each AP class. According to Ms. Ford, “I do know that students of color that are engaged in their education and care about doing well, that they feel it really helps them to have this sense that they’re part of something. That they’re not alone. And because they sometimes do feel very much alone in a classroom that’s all white kids. So I think that [Black Scholars] was a great idea.” As a result, according to Ms. Ford, striving students of color at Lincoln felt part of a larger pattern of success that they shared with their peers.

If students of color perceive that AP courses are for them as well as for white students and there are regular visual examples for them to reference, like Black Scholars and African American AP teachers, then their enrollment in AP courses becomes more likely. These school characteristics that emerged at Lincoln fostered an environment for academic achievement by students of color.

Segregation at the classroom level. The subjects in this study agreed that there is *de facto* segregation in the school at the classroom level but that with open enrollment for honors and AP courses, segregation has diminished. Differing levels of academic preparation among subgroups and reluctance on the part of non-traditional AP students to challenge themselves academically are further complicated by the limitations of the master schedule as students self-select into AP

courses. Course enrollment is a complicated process that does result in racial imbalances in classrooms at Lincoln HS.

Study participants were generally aware that AP classes had become more diverse and inclusive over the past five years. However, the interview protocol—which included sharing the data presented in chapter four with participants—provided additional opportunity for them to reflect upon the progress the school has made regarding equity in AP. Educators were generally happy with the change but also felt the school remained too segregated at the classroom level. “Our [AP] classes are not racially representative of the student body as a whole,” Ms. Ford concluded when studying the school’s AP enrollment data. According to Mr. Abbot, “AP doesn’t have that elitist stigma it had maybe 10-15 years ago. This is a very special school in that it is quite diverse, yet in the classroom there is *de facto* segregation.” Even with open enrollment and incremental shifts to more equity in AP course-taking, segregation at the classroom level remains a characteristic of the school.

Non-traditional AP students tend to be nervous about taking such challenging courses, reported some teachers. According to Ms. Harris, “The high school does a good job of encouraging kids to take AP classes, [though] some kids are afraid of the workload. There is a racial gap.” Ms. Harris notes that while students have the option of enrolling in AP courses, either the complexity of the academic work or the students’ own concern about the volume of work in an AP course discourages students from enrolling in AP courses.

While a formal cohort for students of color was not put in place at the school, some of the subjects interviewed for this study addressed the merits of a cohort model. Mr. Cedar described a group of students in his college prep course: “I had seven African American students who went to the same church, took notes for each other and got copies of work for each other when absent—I pushed all of them to Honors.” Ms. Nelson referred to the school-wide effort to address the achievement gap, stating that while classroom segregation continues, upper level courses have become more diverse. “We have pushed our higher-achieving minority students to achieve at high levels into AP classes. I would’ve loved to have seen more of a cohort model.” Ms. Owens said that the former supervisor of gifted education for the District recommended that the LHS Administration cluster Black students together in upper-level courses, though little formal action was taken by the school to cluster students of color together in designated sections of advanced courses.

The Black student experience in the open-enrollment era was described by Ms. Leaf, from her perspective. “Now we see more students of color going into honors and AP. Black students are looking for a challenge, to have an authentic voice, to have confidence... [we need to] be realistic but not discourage students of color [from enrolling in AP] and watch our own prejudices.” Such a description of the Black student experience by this teacher suggest that the logic behind Black Scholars program—that it would provide a positive peer environment for African American students and disrupt entrenched racial patterns around achievement—was solid. Indeed, Black Scholars, though controversial for separating African American students, has been generally viewed by the subjects interviewed in this

study, as effective in creating positive peer pressure among African American students for academic engagement. As part of a wider structural and cultural effort to increase diverse participation in AP course enrollment, Black Scholars seems to have helped decrease segregation at the classroom level at Lincoln HS.

Step 3. Open enrollment for AP courses

The effect of open enrollment for AP and honors courses is that instead of having teachers and other influential educators choosing to open the gate or not open the gate for students to enter a particular course, students were free to walk through the gate if they chose to do so. According to Ms. Phillips, in the open enrollment era, “It’s up to the students to move up to the next level.” Open enrollment was the most critical change at the institutional level that allowed non-traditional AP students to take on the challenge of these courses.

The school continues to have some characteristics of a tracked system with segregated courses, as racial patterns exist throughout the school in the various course levels. While there are more students of color in honors and AP, college-prep courses – the lower level – still have the highest the percentage of students of color. Ms. Jones: “We still have a fairly segregated school. [College-prep] is mostly African American, honors is mixed, AP is mostly white.” As Ms. Leaf described, “Lower classes are mostly African American and upper classes are mostly white, with teachers vying for the upper classes.” Yet, teachers noted that there had clearly been progress in diversifying AP course enrollment at Lincoln. Mr. Irving stated, “Six or seven out of 25 students this year [in AP] are students-of-color; they run the

gamut in terms of readiness, [but] ten years ago, some of these students would have been shut out of AP...This cohort of African American students are [sic] very comfortable, very much assimilated.” With open enrollment, a more diverse set of students are taking AP.

Tracking, which according to Mr. Irving, has historically taken place at the elementary and middle levels, impacts course enrollment at Lincoln HS. “Some confidence was killed before even reaching high school. [Detracking at elementary and middle levels] has encouraged equity by teaching prerequisite skills. If [you are] interested in equity, focus on the middle levels,” recommended Mr. Irving. Such statements point to the critical role in building prerequisite skills and allowing students to choose their own courses and level of rigor in high school.

Those educators who were in favor of open enrollment expressed support for students being able to freely choose to enter a course of their choice but then almost immediately turned the conversation to what they say to and do with students in an open enrollment environment. Ms. Leaf: “Open enrollment and detracking helped students move toward taking AP, and more parents are aware since open enrollment. Open enrollment—I keep saying that.” Even those who were skeptical of open enrollment expressed understanding for the rationale and then pivoted to describe their messages and actions in the new environment of student choice. One of the teachers whose enrollment numbers and responses in the interview indicate that she was at least passive, if not resistant, to more diversity in AP stated that, “I think open enrollment is beneficial because I think kids should be able to take classes that they want to.” Even though open enrollment proved so

critical to allowing a more diverse set of students into AP courses at Lincoln HS, once that change was made educators in the system spent little time critiquing the school policy of open enrollment and turned their attention to how they proceeded with their work in the new environment. Such a practical approach by these educators at Lincoln fits with Lipsky's (2010) theory that local practitioners make policy and practices functional by implementing the details at the "street level." Later in this chapter I will analyze how teachers' actions and practices shaped enrollment patterns.

Topics of discussion related to equity in AP at Lincoln HS

While teachers at the school generally expressed support for the goal of increasing diversity in AP classes, they also noted that the process was complex and often challenging. When AP courses are made open to students beyond the quickest, most aggressive students in each grade-level, all teachers struggle to maintain the rigor and integrity of their course while they adjust to the wider set of needs inherent in a more heterogeneous set of students. Here I will examine how teachers understood and managed these issues. I will also discuss the contrasts between different types of AP courses, some of which are less conducive to open enrollment than others, the critical role of guidance counselors, and concerns about students' GPAs.

Challenges of open enrollment. There are negative implications to open enrollment, some educators reported. Some students want AP courses listed on their transcripts and that becomes their motivation for taking the course, according

to Mr. Quick. Also, not all students at Lincoln who are stretching to get into an AP course decide to take the AP exam in the end, since taking the AP exam is not a requirement for taking an AP course at Lincoln. Students either “take the challenging course but not the test, or they know they’re ready for the test, and they do well.” Exam-taking and exam results were beyond the scope of this study. In some other schools, taking the AP exam is mandatory for enrolling in the AP course; a few Lincoln teachers expressed some consternation about students taking their course but not sitting for the AP exam.

The rigor of honors courses has dropped since open enrollment, according to some. Mr. Kelly stated that open enrollment has “diversified honors—[that] hopefully rolls into our AP classes. I don’t think we’ve necessarily maintained the rigor in honors classes [specifically with regard to] document analysis and higher order skills.” Other teachers expressed similar concern over maintaining the integrity of the rigor in upper level courses following open enrollment.

A diverse set of students brings wider differences in academic knowledge and skills. Mr. Edwards stated,

Often African American students struggle with basic background knowledge [about news]. For Economics [they often demonstrate] weaker mathematical reasoning, weaker background. Therefore, additional effort is needed...For some they have a rich learning environment at home. Others need the willingness; some step up, for others it’s a struggle. But that will be true when they get to college.

The challenge for the classroom teacher is to figure out how to help the struggling student bridge gaps in knowledge and skills. Mr. Edwards implies that it is better for students to struggle in high school where there is more time for teacher support compared to the college environment.

Supporting the skill growth of non-traditional AP students while maintaining the necessary content depth and pacing is a challenge for teachers. When Mr. Edwards expressed concern about the cultural gap that weaker students have and was asked about any way to bridge that cultural knowledge gap, he stated, “That’s one of the most challenging aspects of being an AP teacher. As a teacher you have to give extra help,” yet you must teach the full content and skills required for the course. Similar to Mr. Edwards, Ms. Irving stated, “The challenge I have is teaching content and writing essays and reading the textbook—it really is reliant on the teacher to provide a lot of the assistance. Try to build in academic skills like thesis building—then I have to cut into content; I can’t do it all.” Several teachers expressed concern about balancing the need to provide academic support without undermining the integrity of the course.

Open enrollment brings increased student opportunity but also more risk because students may ultimately perform poorly in the class. This possibility was a concern for Mr. Edwards, who observed, “We deny them the opportunity to make that change if we close the doors to them. On the other hand, there is a great deal of risk for students.” The risk, stated a few educators, is potentially failing the course and impact of that on students’ GPA and their academic confidence.

Despite these concerns, teachers generally believed that open enrollment has made academic opportunity more accessible for a much wider set of students. Mr. Quick reflected on the overall data trend: “We’ve been focused on the achievement gap for five years. Reducing tracks, while creating some negatives, has led to more students of color taking challenging courses.” Ms. Bell stated that students have told

her that they sign up for AP courses due to the serious learning environment set by teachers and followed by students in AP courses.

Teachers expect motivation in non-traditional AP students. Teachers of non-traditional AP students at Lincoln consistently noted that such students need to have academic initiative and motivation to complete their assignments; without such traits, students who enter AP courses with underdeveloped skills and knowledge will struggle mightily. Mr. Quick's description of what students need coming into his class are similar to those of several of his colleagues. He said, "Foundational skills are needed: solid writing, communication, solid work ethic for completion, initiative, asking for help." This list of real-world skills for success in one's career are important to learn in high school, implies this teacher.

Teachers strongly believed that non-traditional AP students must be highly motivated to succeed in their classes. Multiple educators in this study made similar statements regarding student motivation. Mr. March stated, "The key is that students need to be motivated...Students who push up to AP feel good about themselves." Mr. Abbott agreed: "If a student has an attitude of, 'Okay, help me, what can I do, how can I do this?' then we'll make a connection" and the student will have a strong likelihood of success. Ms. Leaf made a similar point: "Students who are invested can take any course they choose [and meet with success]." According to these statements, if students value school, complete all assignments, and study for tests, then many kids can be successful in AP.

Ms. Davis, who has relatively high enrollment of non-traditional AP students in her class, pointed to student effort as the lynchpin for student success. "I'm

certainly not making special allowances in any way” for students of color or for students who are economically disadvantaged. The difference to her is those students who care and those who don’t – “It’s not a race issue or an SES issue. That’s just a student issue.” If students are going to take on the challenge of an AP course, they need to be dedicated to their studies, otherwise there is little a teacher can do to help the student attain success in the course.

Of course, some students enroll in AP and choose not work very hard. Ms. Ford lamented a student who was struggling in her AP class. “I have an African American male this year who has the aptitude but very poor work habits. He just has not stepped up to the plate. He’s failing my course. Still, [he is] gaining a great deal by being there.” This teacher is frustrated by a promising student’s lack of initiative. Still, she believes that the student is benefitting from being in her AP class.

Yet, some highly motivated non-traditional AP students will struggle when they enter a course with a level of rigor that they haven’t experienced before. According to one of the AP Psychology teachers: “I’ve had 2 or 3 students from feeder general psychology course who have the motivation and interest but don’t perform well on the AP exam.” In these instances, the teacher notices the students’ interest in the course subject matter and the fact that they have built some prior knowledge, yet they ultimately struggle to reach an accomplished level on their AP exams.

Because even highly motivated non-traditional AP students are likely to have some struggles, several of the participants in this study noted the need for

moderation in the number of AP courses that non-traditional AP students should take, and several others pointed to the need for systemic progression of preparation to successfully position more students for entry into AP courses. Mr. March made this statement regarding systemic preparation and moderation: “I think you need steps- skills, honors courses. [Non-traditional AP students] really could be successful but in moderation.” He elaborated, “We want to maintain traditional AP kids. We need moderation – make sure there’s balance in the rest of their schedule.” Ms. Jones stated, “Some 15-16 year olds could handle the rigor of college, have the work ethic, very, very bright...[but going] from no AP classes to 5 could be disastrous.” Mr. March said that both traditional and non-traditional students need balance in their academic schedules. Ms. Rose, a counselor, stated that, “We have discouraged students from jumping 2 levels [from college prep to AP].” This advice to students seems to come from a desire to provide students with pragmatic coaching as they make their course selections.

While many teachers saw hard work as essential to AP success, one teacher expressed a different perspective, emphasizing that hard work alone would not help students who were not “ready.” According to Ms. Jones, many students feel that if they study longer, they will do better in her course; but that’s not the case, she said. She explained that students should not study “four hours a night—that’s insane.” She went on, “It think it is important in an open enrollment setting that you give kids the option out,” so that they can drop the course. Ms. Jones explained that she has been “talking with teachers about who wasn’t ready” for the AP course as she analyzes students’ success and failure in her course. Perhaps not surprisingly given

her belief about students' abilities, Ms. Jones's participation from non-traditional AP students is low relative to other AP teachers in this school.

As a vestige of the old system in which students needed teacher recommendations to enter AP, in some instances waivers are presented to students when the counselor and teacher is concerned that a student is signing up for a course that is not being recommended. The waiver confirms that the final decision about course selection rests in the hands of the student, but it allows the counselor and teacher to voice formal caution to a student as they attempt to provide informed, realistic advice. Ms. Phillips stated, "The reason we have a jump in enrollment for students of color is the waiver to open enrollment, [which] demonstrates motivation on the part of the student. The waiver is not a barrier but a healthy hurdle." If the student signs the waiver and signs up for the course, Ms. Phillips implies that the student is making a commitment of academic motivation. Cognitive effort and assignment completion are most critical for non-traditional AP students, according to most of the educators who participated in this study.

"Pipeline" AP courses compared to "Anybody can take" AP courses. One important theme that emerged in my interviews was that some courses – for example, mathematics, physical science, and world languages – require heavy prerequisite skills and are effectively closed to students unless they take the sequence of courses to put them in the position to enroll in those specialized AP courses. Open enrollment has less immediate impact on such courses because if non-traditional AP students are not in the feeder course, they are functionally prohibited from taking that particular AP course. As a result, an approach that

builds a pipeline of students with the technical skills to successfully enroll in such AP courses is needed. Other courses – in the humanities and social sciences – have few prerequisite skills preventing entry into the course. This theme of “pipeline” courses with heavy prerequisite skills compared to “anybody can take” AP courses emerged as a critical theme because it helped explain on-going patterns of segregation in some classes.

Mathematics provides an excellent example of how “pipeline” courses are systematically different from, for example, an AP social studies course. AP Calculus should not be taken directly after Geometry, for example; instead, the critical institutional step is to have as many students taking Algebra I in 8th grade as possible so that they are in line to take the necessary sequence of courses to enroll in AP Calculus by their senior year. Ms. Ford provided an extended description about open enrollment in AP and how that has played out in math. She explained how that is building: “The progressive nature of math instruction—needs a strong feeder program...That’s only going to happen if there’s a whole supporting structure going way back over the years...We have more Black kids in honors Algebra II and Pre-Calc. Our Pre-Calc is more Black than ever and doing well.” Regarding early math instruction, Ms. Ford stated, “Some students, way back in elementary school have been separated into a higher level of instruction. There’s esteem, a motivator...[overall, though] kids in 4th grade are capable [in math] of way more. This is the whole dilemma.” The capstone course of the mathematics department is Calculus BC. Ms. Ford: “Calc BC offers a theoretical perspective [while Calc AB does not]. African American students are often, though not always, among the lowest in

the class. I'm all for letting someone try [laughs] but the track record isn't great."

Ms. Harris also stressed the need for a stronger pipeline in the elementary schools to position more students for success in technical courses. Similarly, Mr. March stated that the school system ought to, "Systemically, push back the pre-recs in math." If a diverse set of students are accelerated in math in elementary school, more are likely to be in a position to take the capstone course in high school.

Without the necessary sequence of prerequisites in place for a student, the school's announcement to students that they may sign up for any AP course they choose is practically limited due to their lack of skill progression through earlier courses.

While concern for the rigor of curricula and instruction in an era of open AP enrollment was expressed by several interviewees, math and physical sciences – with their necessary sequence of prerequisites – have maintained the same high academic standards, according to teachers in those departments. Regarding whether the department should adjust the rigor of the high school math courses to make them more inclusive, Ms. Ford stated that several outspoken African American teachers in the department spoke up to say, "Do not change the rigor of honors. Don't do it! We've got to maintain that level." Ms. Ford indicated that the voice of African American teachers in the math department was important to the direction of the department in their response to open enrollment.

Educators in this study wrestled with the dilemma of maintaining academic rigor while encouraging non-traditional AP students to register for "pipeline" courses. Mr. Owens stated that he is interested in the pipeline and in the welcoming environment for AP courses. "How do we better prepare students for AP?" he asked.

“The Calc BC performance [is high]...if they’re in a position to take the course.” Mr. Quick: “Rigor has to be upheld...We have improved so much [yet] we need to be very careful – not everyone is capable of taking an AP class – not emotionally mature enough.” If the academic rigor of AP courses is maintained, then students entering the courses must be willing to put in the dedicated study time as well as mastery of the prerequisite courses in order to succeed in “pipeline” courses, several educators concluded.

Other courses that do not require strict prior prerequisite skill development are seen as courses that “anyone can take,” and such courses are immediately affected by open enrollment. Analyzing the AP courses and exams that students of color at Lincoln HS are taking, Mr. Kelly stated, “That does not surprise me – which [courses] they’re taking because they’re the ones you don’t have to have as much background in. They’re kind of encapsulated courses.” In English and social studies, and even life science courses, according to Mr. Irving, “You have a lot more subjective material to a certain extent...so there’s a lot of room for growth outside of the classroom that you might not have for mathematics or science.” Several educators interviewed, like Mr. Irving, view the AP humanities and social sciences differently from how they view the AP math and physical science courses.

The influential role of guidance counselors. The influence of guidance counselors – and the variety in different counselors’ knowledge and skills – plays a critical role in influencing student course selection. Mr. Owens stated that some counselors are effective at increasing AP course enrollment by encouraging enrollment by a diverse set of students. Mr. Owens described one counselor who

does a good job, saying that the counselor is “frank but very optimistic...honest and candid but very positive” and that the counselor encourages students to “go have a conversation with the teacher” of any particular AP course to see if it would be a good fit. The tone of realistic engagement with students and prudent advocacy noted about this counselor was appreciated by her colleague.

In our interview, the one counselor recognized by a few of the subjects in this study as effective at encouraging diverse AP enrollment described how students select their courses: students talk with teachers, make their selections on-line, then talk with the counselor to see if they have too many AP courses or not enough, especially relative to their career interests. At that point the counselor stated that she gives honest feedback to the student regarding how much time they spend on their homework, their organizational levels, their emotional readiness – in order to help students make a good selection. Another guidance counselor interviewed stated, “I have encouraged most of my seniors who have not taken an AP class...to take at least one, and usually just one.” Her only serious reservation, she stated, was having students take an AP course as a required course in their senior year, so she encourages elective AP courses. Mr. Kelly criticized the lack of consistency among the guidance counselors. He said, “There is not a clear message through the guidance department...It’s very guidance counselor to guidance counselor.” Such variation within the guidance department can have substantial difference on the kind of advice one student gets compared to another.

One counselor, in fact, made a statement during the interview that implied she was unaware of open enrollment as the new practice. She stated that placement

in AP courses is based on grades and teacher recommendations, but in fact, that is no longer the case since the school shifted to open enrollment; this misinformation would certainly negatively affect course enrollment for non-traditional AP students guided by this counselor. Such variation in the quality of counseling is of major concern, especially for the students who only get their advice from this one counselor.

Why not take AP: GPA concerns. Some students do not take AP courses due to grade point average (GPA) concerns, reported several interviewees. Mr. Irving noted the GPA consideration for students: “They are trying to balance challenging courses and maintain a high-level GPA.” He went further to say that, “A lot of students will just say plainly, ‘I don’t want to do that much work.’” Ms. Phillips also stated that GPA considerations have a dampening effect on AP enrollment: “Some don’t take AP because they’re afraid of the effect on their GPA.” Two coaches reportedly told students not to take AP because of the time commitment and possible negative effect on their GPA. Mr. Garcia stated that other factors affect the courses that students select, like the shape of their roster relative to when each course is offered in the master schedule.

Socioeconomic status (SES) discussed minimally. While I had set out in the design of this study to address race and class concerns related to AP course-taking, SES played a limited role in my qualitative analysis. The number of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were reported in the quantitative data set, but as I progressed through my protocol of questions with the participants in this study, they had very little to say regarding students of low SES status. There is a

correlation between race and SES in AP course enrollment at Lincoln, as seen in Tables III and IV, but through the process of analyzing my interviews, I found essentially no direct comments were made regarding SES alone. I think that since educators cannot easily identify which high school students are of low SES by sight and because the school list of such students is confidential, those who participated in this study had minimal thoughts on the subject. Instead, participants talked more about non-traditional AP students globally, with a focus on race.

Role of parents discussed minimally. While parents' use of social and cultural capital was part of the review of the literature in chapter 2 of this dissertation, the participants in this study made minimal comments regarding the role of parents in the course-selection process. This lack of consideration of the role of parents in process of high school students selecting their courses, is most likely, I think, a result of teachers, administrators and guidance counselors being practitioners who focus on the students with whom they are working, with less regard for the opinions and input of those students' parents. Focusing exclusively on the effect of parents on AP course selection would make for an interesting follow-up study to this dissertation.

Academic support? Another important theme that emerged was the question of whether or not non-traditional AP students should have formal academic support to help them succeed in such a new and challenging learning environment. Ms. Rose referenced a program of academic support for students stretching themselves to take more difficult courses than they had attempted in the past, which was similar to the AVID program, a well-known support program for

secondary students. “Thirteen years ago we started Rising Stars then Phase Advancement; kids need to support each other...other kids are in that same boat— They were a little scared and feeling a little bit out of place, maybe.” Ms. Rose referenced Rising Stars and Phase Advancement programs, though no longer in place, as helpful to students striving for higher levels of academic challenge.

While there are not formal academic supports for students in AP courses, several teachers described how they support struggling students in their AP classes. Ms. Ford described herself: “I am a very supportive teacher...Many hours every week working one-on-one with anyone who comes for help – available without judgment...I don’t badger kids. This is a college course. I am here. I will give you as much support as you need.” An AP Physics teacher instructs so that his students feel prepared to take the exam, though that is not the most important concern in the course. “Taking the test is such a small part of what the field [of engineering] is...[The AP course and exam] is not to discourage students from going into the field...The test matters but it’s one test in one day and students only have 1 minute, 15 seconds per question.” This teacher stated he is teaching for 1. Skill development and 2. Transfer, since “they may go into finance or statistics” as a career. The range of academic supports this teacher recommends to his students are: “1. Come to me. 2. Get an AP guidebook. 3. Get a tutor, maybe even from National Honor Society.” One other subject in this study suggested that high school students who have taken the course before should participate in the course again, acting as a Teacher’s Assistant, like they might in college. Academic supports for AP students across Lincoln HS are informal.

The lack of formal support for AP students was a concern to some at the school. An administrator concluded that while a few teachers provide meaningful academic support to students, “We have a divided school [with regard to AP support, with some saying]—if they’re AP why do they need supports?” I will provide an analysis of teachers’ differing stance on this issue below. Similarly, a guidance counselor stated, “We assume that because a student is in AP that they don’t need help; it’s not always the case.” Both this administrator and this counselor implied that the school needed a more formal and well-developed system of support.

Yet, academic support is ancillary to the daily interaction and instruction that a teacher provides in class for his or her students. Daily student motivation and diligence is critical. As Ms. Nelson stated, “I think it goes much further than natural intelligence. You know, if someone has an interest in a subject, I think I can foster the skills or facilitate the skills necessary to be successful in an AP class. It’s a formula. And I think anyone can learn the formula...If you can learn the vocab, you can get a 3.” If students are motivated and are paired with an AP teacher who is supportive of their success, the combination usually works out reasonably well, implied this educator and others. What matters most is what happens with the instruction and relationship between the AP teacher and his or her students on a daily basis. Ms. Nelson concluded: “I believe you could put kids in front of the right teacher and you can teach them anything.” Even without a formal system of academic support, the teacher’s view of non-traditional AP students and their approach with them is critical to diversifying AP course enrollment.

Resistant or progressive: Conflicting views on equity

In my interviews, I found that educators generally fell into two “camps” with respect to increasing equity in AP courses. Certainly, there is room for more nuanced understanding of educators’ understanding of equity as it relates to AP course-taking; for example, educators might fit better on an equity continuum or may be better understood considering change-over-time. For simplicity’s sake, though, I limited my analysis to two camps of educators—as either “resistant” or “progressive.” Those resistant to change as it related to equity were at least skeptical if not dismissive of Black Scholars and had a passive stance on open enrollment. They expressed that “acting white” is a wide-spread concern for students of color at the school. These educators took a sink-or-swim approach to the success of nontraditional AP students who enrolled in AP courses. Progressive educators made statements in support of Black Scholars and open enrollment. Educators in this study who were in favor of Black Scholars and who describe more students of color moving beyond “acting white,” were themselves more active in addressing equity issues in the school. These educators recruited and supported nontraditional students for their AP classes.

Resistant view: Black Scholars. Because Black Scholars is a separate honor society for students of color, some educators at the school thought that the program was a step in the wrong direction, and not all those interviewed agreed that Black Scholars has been a success. Ms. Jones, who has very few students of color in her course that is required for graduation, dismissed the idea of Black Scholars: “I don’t

think there is any formal way where they could go to students of color and get that kind of encouragement.” By encouragement this teacher seems to be referring to positive peer culture. Mr. Quick stated, “I’m not sure Black Scholars has done a whole lot for that culture [among Black students] that it’s not cool to do well in school.” According to these educators, Black Scholars has had no real effect on students of color who are striving to participate in upper-level courses, and they see Black Scholars as creating new kinds of separation by race.

Resistant view: “Acting White.” When the 19 subjects in this study were asked, “Do you think there is a stigma about ‘acting white’ for students of color in this school?” seven said that there is no stigma for being an academically motivated or high achieving student of color. Six said that yes there is a stigma about acting white. Seven said they either did not know or they gave a mixed answer. Here, we take a look at those who said there is a stigma about acting white.

One teacher with low enrollment of students of color and students economically disadvantaged stated, “Oh, yeah, absolutely [there is a stigma about acting white]. [Students of color] don’t want to lose their core group of friends over something they can control, like education. So, I think there is a stigma.” When asked if the teacher had ever seen students break out of that, the teacher responded, “Not in my...kids don’t like to be different.” The teacher who said this evidently believes that students of color do not want to be different from the majority of their friends and therefore do not aspire to take upper-level courses.

Views about “acting white” did not fall along racial lines. One African American educator in the school lamented the problem of “acting white” among

students of color. “‘Acting White’ is alive and well. Associated with being a nerd. Black people strongly embrace being cool. We try to eradicate that stereotype as adults every chance we get. It’s perpetuated by music and TV.” This educator sees a powerful cultural effect on teenagers of color that dominates students’ self-perceptions.

Resistant view: Sink-or-swim. Educators who were pessimistic about positive shifts in academic achievement for African American students were the same who were passive in their own actions related to generating more equity in AP course enrollment. Those teachers’ courses tended to have much lower enrollment for non-traditional AP students. A social studies teacher said that, “I’ll talk to honors and AP teachers but I don’t do a whole lot of [student] recruitment.” This teacher’s non-traditional AP student enrollment is roughly in the middle of Table IV in the previous chapter.

Ms. Jones is one of the teachers who took a more passive role regarding non-traditional students taking upper-level courses. She stated, “I think we have a lot of students of all races who are very hesitant to challenge themselves...don’t have the work ethic. I mean our classes have really, the whole time I’ve been here, have been segregated. I think there is self-segregation. And obviously most of my AP classes are white.” Ms. Jones indicates that she accepts a high level of segregation in the academic programming of the school. Students of color choose not to enroll in her course even though that course is in the top five courses nationally that students of color take. It seems that students know they will not be in a supportive academic

environment in this teacher's class since she sends a tacit message that she is accepting of academic segregation.

Instead of a complex consideration of how to motivate and support non-traditional AP students, educators who are resistant to equity described their instructional practices in passive terms and seemed to expect students to succeed only through individual effort. These educators dismissed the influence of Black Scholars on the increased enrollment in AP by students of color. Yet, they also stated that such students struggle with building an identity of being an academically high-achieving student of color. The paradoxical conclusion is that students of color should not be separated to build a positive academic culture for students of color even though they are substantially affected by a cultural expectation of being cool. For their part, educators resistant to equity expressed that the burden on changing academic expectations for students of color is on the students alone, not the educators. Students of color must earn their way, as they either sink or swim in the AP courses in which they enroll.

Resistant teachers create intimidating AP courses. The opposite of student encouragement is curricular intimidation. According to Ms. Jones, also quoted above: "The curriculum will be the gatekeeper. The rigor of the course will, if kids can drop the class, will essentially drive some of those kids out where kids will say, 'Okay, this was a mistake.' ...But most 16-year-olds can't really handle this stuff. And that's okay. That's normal." Ms. Jones's course has a low-level of enrollment among students of color and those economically disadvantaged compared to other AP courses in the school.

The low enrollment of students of color in AP United States History was noted by several subjects interviewed in this study. Mr. Cedar, looking at the AP United States History enrollment, stated, “I think the history stuff could pick up. The numbers are low.” Mr. Kelly, upon looking at the data, stated, “We should have more in US History...US History student of color enrollment is low. I don’t know if it’s...[students are] scared of the work, teacher reputation, not prodded by guidance...” Mr. Owens stated that, “Maybe students of color take honors instead of AP English and history—want the rigor to show up on their transcript.” AP English Literature and US History enrollment by non-traditional AP students lag well behind expectations relative to the student body composition as a whole even though they are highly subscribed courses by students of color nationally.

When the AP United States History teacher, who has low diversity enrollment, was asked why there was an increase in students participating in AP, he stated, “I don’t know—ask the counselors.” Upon a little more reflection, that teacher considered, “...certain reputations. So I kind of understand why some kids will gravitate away from...my class because of the things that they’ve heard about the rigor.” The same teacher noted that the AP Psychology teachers “are trying to, you know, keep the rigor and keep the standard because they kind of have to, but they try to adapt some of their teaching methods to be a little more inclusive to kids that are maybe stretching themselves by taking an AP class.” The AP United States History teacher, by implication, does not consider himself inclusive or accommodating to students who are stretching themselves but instead using the amount and rigor of the coursework to discourage student enrollment in his course.

Resistant teachers, instead of encouraging diverse enrollment in their courses, foster an intimidating academic reputation, beginning with summer assignments. One administrator noted that some teachers give so much summer work that it seems intentionally discouraging to first-time AP students. Teachers who have low enrollment by students of color and students of low socioeconomic status tend to share these views and practices.

According to one educator interviewed, to care, reach, know students and their interests—does not happen consistently at Lincoln. Ms. Nelson: “It happens in some of our classrooms phenomenally well, and sometimes it doesn’t happen at all,” and then she recounted an incident in which a teacher who usually has good intentions with students told an African American student to “know your place,” and related how damaging this comment was to the student/teacher relationship.

Progressive view: Black Scholars. In contrast, the progressive approach included a purposeful effort on the part of several influential educators who initiated Black Scholars for the purpose of getting students of color to aspire to join a formal peer group that valued academic achievement. One administrator said that when speaking with Black students and parents, she often says, “I expect you to be taking an AP course and I expect you to be in Black Scholars.” Ms. Davis stated, “In an ideal world [Black Scholars] would not be necessary, but right now certainly we need it...Controversy be damned.” Ms. Owens said that she gives some credit to the increase in the number of students of color in AP courses to the Black Scholars program. So, while some educators at Lincoln HS do not view Black Scholars as fair or effective, on balance, the subjects in this study concluded that Black Scholars

helped create an environment that high academic achievement for African American students in the school was normal and expected.

Progressive view: “Acting white.” The educators who fell into the progressive category said they generally do not perceive a stigma about acting white for students of color. Mr. Garcia: “I’m seeing less of that... a fading. A tipping point? Sure hope so. High-achieving, academically-oriented African American identity doesn’t seem to be stigmatized.” Ms. Phillips said she perceives the school to be “a melting pot. No cliques in students or parents. LHS has a culture of acceptance.” Mr. March said that it is not like it was 15 years ago, implying that the school is more academically integrated. Ms. Rose stated that there is, “Not as much [stigma about ‘acting white’] as in other schools...now there’s less. Maybe with open enrollment more and more African American students care, are opting to take honors classes...I think that it’s not as much as they don’t want to act white as that they just don’t think they can do that hard work. And I think that they’ve never had that challenge before and it’s scary.” Progressive educators in this study have a more complex view of the social and academic experience for students of color in the school.

One of the African American teachers of an AP course provided more depth in his response. “We have such a diverse population of black students that really people understand that there’s diversity within our population.” He elaborated that a lot of African American students are well-rounded, not just nerdy, and so “It’s very difficult to put them in that kind of box.” If there were just a few Black students in AP that might be a concern, according to this teacher, but he stated, “Some are brilliant ‘A’ students, some struggle like any other AP students...They don’t all sit

together; they are very well assimilated.” Such a description of the social and academic environment at the school is part of the hoped outcome of an academic identity for students coming through the Black Scholars program.

Another of the African American educators concluded that “acting white” is more subtle here at this school for two reasons: 1. This school is more tolerant of difference. 2. There is a greater population of minority students who take academics very seriously. Whether such students arrive at this school taking academics seriously or if academic drive was cultivated after enrolling was not discussed as part of the interview protocol.

Progressive view: Recruit and support. Teachers who expressed progressive views on equity have more diverse enrollment in their AP courses. Student enrollment in AP courses is determined by student choice as a result of open enrollment and is encouraged through student conversations with teachers, counselors, administrators, and other students. These conversations have definitely increased in the last five years, according to Mr. March, coinciding with open enrollment. Teacher reputation is a big reason that students sign up for a particular AP course, according to several subjects interviewed in the course of this study. Ms. Phillips stated that teacher relationship and teacher advocacy matter when it comes to student course selection. Mr. Owens stated,

I know that there are some teachers who are very concerted in their efforts to motivate students across the board to try an AP course. I wish there were more, and there are probably some who are not aware of the conversations that would motivate kids. But I think that daily interaction, the student/teacher relationship has a big influence on student choice of courses.

Messages from the teacher that affect the student/teacher relationship, student-to-student recommendations about certain courses, and peer encouragement of one another affect student course selection.

Several teachers of AP courses make presentations to the previous grade and have personal conversations with students about their course and their academic expectations during course selection. Mr. Edwards stated that his personal conversations with students and parents help them clearly understand the requirements and challenges of taking his AP course. Those conversations have been important to student course selection, according to Mr. Edwards. Students enroll in AP courses due to teacher encouragement, according to Mr. Kelly, especially when individual teachers go into honors and college prep classes to encourage students to enroll in their course; "It's self-interest driven," stated Mr. Kelly, as teachers need students to register for their course among so many other AP offerings. Ms. Nelson pointed to the fact that with the African American student population increasing and AP teachers wanting to keep their course enrollment numbers up, that dynamic could help with recruitment of non-traditional students and with equity enrollment.

Recruitment by active, progressive educators positively affects AP enrollment by students of color. The Biology teacher said that she invites all Chemistry students in both honors and college prep to consider taking AP Biology. The teacher has asked students who ended up taking the course, "Did my visit make a difference in taking the course? They reported to her, 'Yes. Huge.'" The Biology teacher said, "I want the regular kid in my AP Bio class. I even know my scores are

going to go down and I don't care. I want to get them to the best point I can." The Statistics teacher stated, "Counselors promote it. It's a popular course. That's what I want." The result is that these AP courses, Biology and Statistics, have high enrollment by non-traditional AP students.

Mr. Cedar stated that he started moving students up to more challenging courses a number of years ago. "I thought it was a problem that there was an absence of color when 35% of the school population was African American [and the AP courses were predominantly white]." Mr. Cedar stated that he would advocate for students with guidance counselors and with the department head. "If they told me no, I'd come back again. 'He's not going to go away,' they'd say." Mr. Cedar has been an influential educator who has promoted equity in AP course-taking at this school, even prior to open enrollment. The percentage of non-traditional students who take his course is among the highest in the school.

Mr. Edwards provided a full description of how his realistic and thorough approach cultivates student interest in his course. He stated that, "I encourage [students] to take the course if they have a legitimate interest in the course. Also, if they're not willing to put in sweat equity, then taking AP classes is not probably a wise thing." Mr. Edwards used the term "legitimate interest" three times during the interview. He recruits students:

I speak to students personally – especially minority students – about the challenges, interests, background – telling them, 'If you need help, I'm going to be there for you.' Provided that their interest and reasons for taking the course are appropriate, I give them a positive response for taking the course...I've 'scouted' minority students, and supported an African-American student with interest even though she had a weak track record.

Mr. Edwards concluded that “I have no issue with a kid trying out a higher-level class provided it does not jeopardize graduation.” So, Mr. Edwards believes in an open door to AP courses for students who truly want to learn deeply and are willing to put in the work to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the course. His concern for non-traditional AP students is that they may not put in the hard work to succeed in the course, which could jeopardize graduation. Mr. Kelly, similar to Mr. Edwards, stated that recommendations made to students could be more strategic, encouraging students to take AP courses that if failed would not cause the student not to graduate.

Progressive teachers create trendy AP courses. AP courses can become “a little trendy,” according to Mr. Abbott but still maintain their rigor. Teacher reputation has a big effect on which students and how many students take a particular course. “Well, I know that the reputation of a course or a teacher has a huge impact on student selection of the course,” stated Ms. Ford. Mr. Owens noted the clusters of students of color and those economically disadvantaged students enrolled in Psychology and Biology in this school.

In fact, Psychology enrollment for all students, including students of color, has seen a tremendous leap. One of the Psychology teachers described that class as having a learning environment in which, “Kids always get to know each other and they enjoy coming to class...students talk everyday, pretty much all of them.” The course is social and popular. For some students, Psychology is considered easier; according to Mr. Abbott, some say, “If it’s the easy AP, it’s the one for me.” Ms. Bell said that Psychology is known as “the easy AP” or the “gateway AP.” Psychology is

also an elective – not a required course, which makes it less threatening if a student were to fail the course. In addition, because it is an elective, students tend to take Psychology because they have an interest in it. Ms. Bell stated that “Psychology is fun, inherently interesting, and students have the sense that ‘I haven’t failed this before’ like perhaps in math or history—so they feel that they will get a fair shot at success.” The Psychology course incorporates quite a bit of student voice as one Psychology teacher explained, “We balance the hard work with cool projects.” Another teacher also observed that student leaders in this school always seem to take AP Psychology.

One of the guidance counselors stated, “The AP courses I recommend most commonly are Psych, Stat, and Environmental—I wouldn’t call them easier, but more familiar...They are more accessible than Physics or Chemistry.” In mathematics, Ms. Davis stated that if you take AP Statistics, you can avoid AP Calculus, which might capture a wider range of students. Regarding AP Literature, one counselor said, “You better be able to analyze literature and it’s a required course.” And since twelfth grade English is a required course, AP Literature is less safe for a first-time AP student than an elective would be.

The school has no honors 11th grade science, so more students are taking AP science in their last two years of high school, according to Mr. Kelly. Like Psychology, AP Environmental Science is perceived as not as rigorous, according to Ms. Phillips, and so students can “play it safe” by taking that course. “The reputation for AP Environmental Science is that it will be easy, so let’s put them there,” is how Mr. Cedar described how some students and counselors talk about that course. Yet

when looking at the enrollment data, Mr. Kelly noted that more students are taking Biology compared to Environmental Science and suggested teacher reputation might have something to do with that. Regarding Biology, one of the most popular courses with non-traditional students, the counselor stated that the Biology teacher sends the message to her students that, “If she [the student] works, she’ll be fine.” As a result, the counselor observed: “It’s a safe course...students of color are welcomed, encouraged” in that course. Because it is a safe course, non-traditional AP students are willing to stretch to take the Biology course.

Evolution from resistant to progressive. Even those who were initially skeptical of progressive changes in the school made statements regarding the positive effects of increased equity through open enrollment. Mr. Garcia assessed the school environment among the faculty through the change process to open enrollment; he stated, “Institutional barriers [e.g., tracking] lead to 1. Fatalism or 2. Friction. Removing institutional barriers addresses both. So, institutionally, that was a very successful move. Now it’s a fact and resistance is melting away. With older faculty, there was racism; it’s more natural for younger faculty.” Mr. Garcia is implying that previously students of color would tend to disengage from school (fatalism) or they would resist the school environment by skepticism and antagonism (friction). Without barriers to course enrollment, the choice regarding the level of course rigor that students take rests with the students themselves—and that was the institutional success. The influence of older, resistant faculty who had a negative opinion of Black Scholars and open enrollment dissipated as the school

structures became more progressive and the tone on the faculty began to shift as a result of retirements, with new teachers coming onto the faculty.

The incremental shifts in the English department provide an interesting window to understanding the effects of open enrollment. Placement in AP English Literature formerly was strictly through honors, through a path determined by teacher recommendation. Mr. Cedar described the former process for AP Literature as one characterized by a “multistep teacher gate process.” One AP English teacher reflected: “My thinking has evolved over 17 years. I don’t want to be [the gatekeeper]. Some [non-traditional AP] students are ‘eating up the course.’ The downside is sometimes it’s a quieter class.” Regarding his opinion on open enrollment, “I [used to have] a more traditional, stepwise sequence...” from college prep to honors to AP. “My thinking has evolved,” he concluded. In the last year of reported data, Mr. Owens noted, “In English [Literature], eight kids [of color were] in the course, seven took the test and the average is high—maybe it’s a message: You belong here. The [AP exam] average is higher than other averages.” The AP exam performance data show that students who are willing to take on the academic demands of AP English Literature demonstrate strong performance by the end of that course.

In the school year following the five-year data set presented in the previous chapter, enrollment in AP English Literature by students of color jumped from eight students to 27 students across four sections of the course. Perhaps there was a delay in student interest in the course, as students of color tried to decide which courses were going to be safe courses for them, or perhaps the change in tone from

the leadership in the department created a sense among non-traditional AP students that the course was a safe one to take.

Equity in practice: Caring and flexible, the hallmarks of inclusive educators

The purpose of this dissertation, as stated in first chapter, is not to provide criticism of teachers resistant to diverse enrollment in AP courses or to apply critical theory through lenses of race and class to explain why few students of color and low socioeconomic status are enrolled in AP courses. I selected Lincoln HS as the site of this case study because, while far from perfect, the school showed AP participation data among students of color and low SES that was increasing, year-over-year. On a broad, school-wide scale, said Ms. Bell, “Students’ positive identification to this school helps kids feel like they can do well at school.” That positive identification is most importantly built in classroom after classroom. The point of this study was to reveal what teachers who have high enrollment of non-traditional AP students in their classes are doing to recruit and support those students. In this final section of this chapter, I describe these teachers’ thoughts and actions. Such teachers appear to share two characteristics – 1. They express caring for their students and 2. They are flexible in their instruction and assessment.

Safe teachers and safe courses. The message seems to spread among students regarding which teachers are genuinely interested in having striving, non-traditional AP students in their classes. One administrator explained that some teachers take the approach that “We’re going to make it difficult. We’re not going to give support.” On the other hand, teachers like those teaching Biology and Statistics

encourage enrollment and participation by a broad range of students. One of those teachers, according to an administrator, tells students, “You should try this.’ And, she’s available to work with kids outside of class, [which] makes her and her students successful.” Another administrator, looking at the Biology numbers, stated, “Inviting people [to enroll in an AP course] is the key to equity.” A guidance counselor stated that she has “sent several kids of various ethnic backgrounds to talk to [Biology teacher] because she is very accommodating and her attitude is, ‘If you want to do it, I’ll help you do it, but you’ve got to do the work.’” Such popular AP teachers do not necessarily make the coursework easier, but they create a learning environment that communicates to students that if they work hard, they will be supported and successful.

The Biology teacher explained why the Biology course is highly subscribed: “1. They know I like them. 2. If they do their work, they won’t fail. They trust me enough. Once you have a reputation, it stays with you.” Ms. Rose stated that courses that are most subscribed by non-traditional AP students are popular “because of the teachers—kids are less fearful.” Once teachers create academically safe environments for their students, diverse enrollment follows.

Caring teachers. Having a teacher who expresses caring for his or her students was one of the two critical themes regarding inclusive teachers that emerged from subjects’ responses in this study. What caring looks like varies from teacher to teacher, but those teachers with relatively high levels of participation by non-traditional AP students express caring for students in one form or another. Mr. March stated the reasons a student signs up for an AP course include: the kind of

caring that teacher presents, the student's interest in the subject, and how difficult the student perceives the course to be. One administrator stated, "I think you need [teachers] to believe it can be done...I think you need a really strong teacher that just has this belief... we're just going to, like, turn you on to learning...but we're going to figure it out and you're going to do it." The successful teacher makes the invitation and then the motivated student does the hard work along with them.

For students of color, perceiving that the teacher is genuinely interested in their success makes an important difference in their willingness to take an academic risk. Mr. Edwards stated, "[It] just seems for minority students more so than, you know, white students, that building those personal connections with them is a critical element. I'm not sure it should be that way, but it is...even the upper-level ones. We care how they do, across the board, and they know that." This teacher considers the lens of race and how it affects students' trust of their teacher. The insight of this teacher is consistent with the research of Valenzuela (2009) that found to effectively engage students of color, educators need to develop and express politically aware, authentic caring for their students. If a student of color knows that they have a personal connection with his or her teacher, then the student can focus on the coursework and not worry about if and how their race will affect their performance in the class. If the teacher cares and they know that, then students of color are more likely to take on academic challenges.

One participant is an African American educator whose daughter attended the school. He reported that a "teacher saw something and encouraged my daughter. Motivation, somebody planting the seed, nurturing them and building

their confidence.” In this case the teacher recognized and encouraged this student and fostered her academic confidence. In referencing the importance of caring in teaching, Ms. Leaf said, “It’s about seeing the person—[telling him or her] ‘You know, you’re good at this.’” According to these participants in this study, the personal connection and encouragement, especially for students of color, proved critical in building students’ confidence to enroll in an AP course.

Ms. Davis said that advice that she received from an African American teacher when she first started teaching at diverse Lincoln HS was that, “You gotta get kids to like you...[They are] also more likely to forgive you your excessive work that you give them or forgive other things that maybe you’re not perfect at.” This teacher made a concerted effort to have quality relationships with a broad range of students at Lincoln. Enrollment data indicate that she has been successful in gaining non-traditional AP students’ trust.

Some teachers with high enrollment of non-traditional AP students are overt about making statements of caring to their students. Mr. Cedar said, “I’m OK using the word ‘love’...And because I come from a position of caring, I can get away with saying a lot of things.” Continuing, he said, “I also know when to back off. I don’t write anybody up.” This teacher provides a year-end Sunday dinner and AP review session: “I would give a big party for all my students, sometimes as many as 90, at my house or church and would do a 4-hour review.” This teacher’s overt expressions of caring are apparently well received by his students; his courses are among the most popular among non-traditional AP students.

One AP math teacher explained that she cares for her students individually by holding a scheduled, full-period, one-on-one meeting with each student in her AP class. “I want them to be sure that I’m noticing and that I care. I think that my students know that I care about them individually, that I’m willing to go out of my way to support them and help them.” This personalized oral conversation about math and broader college and career goals, subsequent to the AP exam, takes the place of a written final exam for the course. The time and attention that this teacher takes with each student is well-known among the student body.

Informally, teachers can build their reputation as caring. One of the AP English teachers reported, “Spoken Word [student club] kids came into my room. They saw a class, a teacher that was receptive – asked me to co-sponsor Spoken Word. Now three [students from the club] are in my AP class.” This enrollment in AP English Literature seems to be a combination of the school’s open enrollment practice and non-traditional AP students perceiving the teacher as being welcoming to them. The teacher self-reflected, “I tend to be very welcoming...I tend to err much more on giving students the benefit of the doubt...I think students get to start over, even as late as senior year of high school.” Encouragement for students to take rigorous courses in their final years of high school may radically change their college and career paths.

Like students, guidance counselors, who give course enrollment advice, make judgments about which teachers are open to working with non-traditional AP students. One of the guidance counselors stated that, “I absolutely see when a teacher projects: ‘I want you to succeed’ – they’re more approachable, which is a

huge key.” Another counselor who is more of a pragmatist said, “There’s a fine line between caring and enabling. You can express concern and care for a student while holding the line.” A third counselor explained from her perspective that, “Caring doesn’t look the same at the high school level.” That counselor went on to describe the Biology teacher, who while an outspoken advocate for students, is “a bear” in his academic expectations (see, for example, Delpit, 2012, regarding warm demanders).

Teachers in this study who either themselves made statements about how they demonstrate that they care about their students or who were described by colleagues, counselors or administrators as caring about their students had higher enrollment in their AP courses among non-traditional students than those who were not described in such terms. Ms. Harris said simply, “A caring environment is a successful environment.”

Instructional flexibility. Instructional flexibility was the second important theme that emerged regarding teachers with relatively high diversity enrollment in their AP courses. These successful teachers tend to focus on course mastery, provide flexibility in deadlines and classroom management, and promote inquiry. The data indicate that teachers who are flexible in instruction and assessment are more likely to have a diverse set of students enroll in their AP courses.

Mr. Cedar stated that he teaches for mastery and looks at his students as kids first. He allows for flexible deadlines for students to promote mastery learning. In our interview, he provided an extended description of flexibility regarding assessments in his class:

There’s very few assignments that have a cut-and-dry deadline. There has to be a reason for it. And I tell them that in the beginning of the year. If I tell you this lab is

due by Friday, it's because I know we're moving onto this new material and you will need to have mastered it and that's why I want it due on Friday...But if you don't get the chance to get it done by Friday, I don't care. But you're going to lose pace and we're all moving into the next chapter. So you really want to look at your schedule and get it done as soon as possible. That's how I see assignments... [For another lab,] I'm insisting it's due by Wednesday because it forces you to look at the animations that will make you understand the test you're going to have on Thursday. So the only times I do hard and fast deadlines are if it must be learned in progression or I'm under the gun for grading.

Mr. Cedar said that assessments are for proving understanding. Besides summative assessments, he stated he will use warm ups to prove knowledge and make reasonable accommodations for students. "You cannot make it so onerous...I don't see why every assignment is equally necessary. But that's philosophy and more of a mastery approach." Mr. Cedar has one of the highest enrollment of non-traditional AP students in his course.

Being flexible with deadlines is critical in supporting non-traditional AP students. According to Mr. Edwards. "Many times in my class where students just legitimately need more time to process the information and work through the material...I'm always negotiating how to allow that flexibility without appearing to play favorites. The willingness to hold them accountable – has to take different forms in different situations." Compared to making all deadlines firm, Mr. Edwards and other teachers who provide flexible deadlines signal to students that, as teachers, they will respond to what students legitimately need in order to succeed in the course.

Inquiry and instructional flexibility, focused on the big picture, emerged as another nuance on the same theme. Mr. Garcia's take on the concept of flexibility was stated in this way: "I think that the key is going to be like a wholesome and

flexible environment in the class...I have to be open to helping kids towards success in a number of ways...build on their enthusiasm for it. I don't know how that pays off in terms of scores." Mr. Garcia explained the rationale for his approach to instruction: "I could make the course very rule-bound, very kind of test-preppy kind of thing...that is drier and much more focused on a test. Instead, I focus on inquiry, robust discussion, and students feel comfortable. It's better for everybody—white kids as well [as students of color]." While this teacher expressed some concern about AP exam scores, he is more concerned with students' quality of academic engagement. More and more non-traditional students enroll in Mr. Garcia's classes each year.

Simply because progressive teachers are flexible does not mean that all students will be successful. Ms. Ford reflected on her interventions with a struggling student. The previous school year: "An African American girl who did not do well told me that I should have confronted her earlier. [I have an] African American male this year where I've done that a couple of times – and it hasn't made a difference." Flexibility, reflection and attempts at engagement do not always yield the result that the teacher seeks, as in this case.

Flexibility in management of the class sends an indication to students regarding the teacher's openness to students' needs. You need to be who you are as a teacher, said Ms. Davis. "I am not a dictator. I'm willing to overlook [student] talking to keep the train moving." Regarding equity and flexibility, Ms. Davis stated that teachers need to consider and reflect on questions of equity: "I think teachers need to start thinking a little bit more about this...maybe act differently and adjust."

For herself, she does this “through a lot of critical self-reflection...and maybe I just have reflexively become different in terms of how I react.” Thinking about equity and reflecting on her own instructional practices and reactions to students’ struggles has made her more effective in working with non-traditional AP students, Ms. Davis implies.

Mr. Kelly sees two different approaches to maintaining rigor in AP courses: One is an approach of unyielding rigor, and the other approach is to maintain high standards with flexibility. The first approach communicates to students that either “you can cut it or you can’t,” while the second approach communicates to students that, “we want you here and we’ll support you.” Mr. Kelly stated, “To push kids with IEPs into AP, you need teacher advocacy. You need to put in time to set up differentiated activities to bridge those gaps. That shows you care.” He concluded that, “As AP teachers...you need to help students get to that point.” Mr. Kelly is going beyond including a diverse set of students by race and class to consideration of an AP classroom environment that is accommodating to students with disabilities.

Interestingly, of the AP teachers with the highest enrollment by students of color, three out of four came to education from a career outside of the field. One worked in a non-profit museum, another was a nurse, and the other was an actuary. One of those teachers who came from another field stated, “We need to get people to be more flexible. Instead of, ‘I can only get a student to this goal this way, then that student doesn’t belong here if they can’t go this path.’” This comment points to the critical role of instructional flexibility in creating a welcoming and successful learning environment for non-traditional AP students.

Academic support and grading. Teachers' responses to students' initial failing assignments are important signals to students. Mr. Cedar reported that he gives students constructive, positive feedback with opportunities for growth when students get low grades on tests. For example, he had one student who was failing and would retake tests at home and identify in the book where she found the answer. "So, I'm willing to do that," he reflected. For English Language Learners, he "gives remediation plus enrichment supported by instructional scaffolding." This short statement by Mr. Cedar indicates a complex approach to students who are intellectually capable and ready for enrichment but who also have a delay in another area, in this case English language development, and therefore need academic support from the teacher to compensate for their language needs.

Emphasis on skill mastery, with less concern for discrete assignments, is potentially another way to provide flexibility. Ms. Jones stated, "It's OK to bomb an assignment—that you're there to help them. Forget the info...what matters more to me is that they master and remember the skills—benefit to education and in life." In contrast to mastery learning, though, a "bombed" assignment does significantly bring down student grades in Ms. Jones' class. Ms. Jones has lower diversity in enrollment when compared to her peers.

Teaching metacognition is another instructional approach. Mr. Cedar said that he teaches metacognition with his students so that they reflect on how they are learning. He referenced using an Understanding By Design approach to teach for mastery by emphasizing Enduring Understandings and science practices. He added

that, “We need to get better at inquiry and problem solving.” Metacognition and scientific thinking, as big ideas, are emphasized in Mr. Cedar’s class.

Other teachers provide some support to students’ grades, rewarding them for their hard work in studying and preparation, so that low test scores do not destroy their grades. Ms. Bell stated that while tests make up about 40% of the course grade, “I support them with a buffer in their grade with a timeline for reading, [and academic points given for] key terms, and outlines for each unit.” She said that she will tutor highly interested, academically struggling students. She uses “a diverse instructional tool kit,” including choosing material that makes for personal connections for students and also cold calling on students in the course of instruction. A flexible approach to assessment is the final piece of what makes a teacher more likely to attract a diverse set of students to her AP course.

Conclusion

The growth and diversification of Lincoln’s AP program is described by Mr.

Kelly in sum:

The number one thing that’s working is there [are] not procedural barriers for [non-traditional AP students] to get into the class. So if they have the motivation to do it, they can do it. That is the #1 thing. And we do have a portion of the staff that is advocating—that’s #2. We have several [other] staff members who are like, ‘I don’t see why students have to take an AP course.’ If we believe and if the research shows that students who take AP courses are more likely to be successful in college, they should be taking them here.

Open enrollment coupled with progressive practices by teachers with non-traditional AP students has created, year-over-year, increased opportunities for students who previously would have been shut out of AP courses.

In five years, Lincoln HS moved from a system laden with tracking, gatekeepers, and varied social and cultural capital to an institution that has provided a rich choice of AP course offerings, established a Black Scholars program to encourage the academic success of students of color, and provided open enrollment to its AP courses. While all teachers struggled teaching their AP courses with more diverse student enrollment, teachers either assumed a resistant stance and intimidating approach to non-traditional AP students or they assumed a progressive stance, inviting and supporting non-traditional AP students in their classes. Those teachers who created an emotionally and academically safe environment, expressed caring for their students, and employed flexible approaches to instruction and assessment have attracted the most diverse set of students to their AP courses.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Access to AP courses matters; those students who have an academically rigorous high school experience are most likely to attend college and persist once there (Adelman, 2006; Caravale and Strohl, 2010). This case study indicates that several factors are essential to successfully increasing the enrollment of non-traditional students in AP courses. A key step is to design an open enrollment policy that allows any student to enroll in a wide set of AP courses. Increasing the number of AP options available to students is also important, as is the institution of a school-based peer support structure for students of color. Educators who create a welcoming environment and employ flexible instructional practices for non-traditional AP students are most successful in creating a supportive learning environment. While this case study is not generalizable, it tells an important story about how schools can move toward more equitable and inclusive enrollment policies and encourage diverse groups of students to enroll in AP courses.

While the theoretical frameworks that I considered at the outset of this study concerned social reproduction theory and policy as practice, in future research considering organizational framework would be an even more apt lens for considering equity and AP course-taking as a phenomenon. Social reproduction theory is important for establishing the need for this study. Policy as practice is helpful in interpreting educators' actions in an environment of open enrollment. However, perhaps the most critical consideration in this study is the role of the

school's organization – its institutional agency – in positively affecting equity in AP course-selection.

Answers to research question

The overarching question for this study is: To what extent and how does a high achieving, diverse high school provide equity in course taking, particularly in Advanced Placement courses? The findings from this case study with qualitative and quantitative data of Lincoln High School, an inner-ring suburban public school, are that the school took three pivotal institutional changes to create an environment to facilitate AP enrollment for a diverse set of students. Successfully inclusive educators proceeded to create learning environments that were perceived as safe for non-traditional AP students.

Institutional structures that promote AP course enrollment for non-traditional AP students. First, the school offered 29 different AP courses for students to choose from; as a result, students had a great variety of courses and teacher personalities to consider when making their course selections. Then, the school established a Black Scholars program, which was an honor society for African American students that served as a feeder to the traditional National Honor Society. Black Scholars, although somewhat controversial, created a formal positive peer culture for African American students. This study indicates that having a separate academic support network for students of color has shown to be beneficial, similar to the work of Tatum (1997) and McGovern, Davis & Ogbu (2008). Last, the school dropped the practice of gate keeping (Oakes, 2005; Burriss and Garrity, 2008) and

allowed students to choose the courses they wanted to enroll in through a shift to open enrollment. These three steps – a variety of AP courses, Black Scholars, and open enrollment – have had the effect of reducing the effects of social and cultural capital differentials (Lareau and Horvat, 1999) on students’ course-taking at Lincoln HS.

Two different teacher approaches to open enrollment. Some teachers approached teaching AP courses in an open enrollment environment by making the courses rigidly rigorous, using the assessments as a sorting mechanism to discourage non-traditional AP students. In contrast, those teachers who created an environment of “invite and support” were more successful in having non-traditional students sign up for their AP courses. The more inclusive teachers knew that their students’ AP exam average scores were likely to drop by having non-traditional AP students in their class, but they wanted such students in their class anyway. The influential role of teachers and counselors in shaping students’ course-taking patterns fits with Lipsky’s (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy and Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) conclusion that local actors’ interpretations and negotiations in everyday interactions play an important role in shaping policy implementation.

Effect of influential educators on diversifying AP course enrollment. Teachers who built reputations as being advocates for non-traditional AP students and who established their course reputations as being “safe courses” for such students built more diverse enrollment for their courses. Teachers who created a culture of caring (Valenzuela, 2008) for students of color made an important difference in such students’ willingness to take on the challenge of an AP course.

Flexibility in instruction and assessment promoting a mastery approach to student learning created an environment that seemed to increase the likelihood that non-traditional AP students would meet with success in the course. More non-traditional AP students enrolled in AP courses with teachers who were expressly caring and flexible in instruction and assessment.

Challenges and successes in providing an equitable AP program at Lincoln HS

Teaching a diverse set of students is a challenge for all AP teachers at Lincoln. Maintaining rigor and pacing in the course while providing necessary support for non-traditional AP students has proved to be a challenging task for AP teachers. Yet, at Lincoln, institutional support for non-traditional AP students coupled with the actions of progressive educators has created a course-enrollment structure and an inclusive environment that has supported more students taking on the challenge of AP coursework. With open enrollment and a portion of the staff advocating for non-traditional AP students, Lincoln is positioning more students for success in college.

This dissertation in context

Detracking. In the 1980s, Jeannie Oakes called attention to the negative consequences of tracking, showing both that track assignment is racially patterned and that it has the effect of predetermining the long-term educational trajectory of students. Those students in the advanced track are put on the course to college and professional careers; those shut out of advanced courses will face an uphill struggle to succeed in college and beyond. This dissertation confirms Oakes's theory that

when a school creates a variety of rigorous learning opportunities for all students and invites them to enroll in challenging courses to engage in that rigorous learning, a much wider set of students are capable of getting on paths to advanced academic success while still in high school.

Beyond “Acting White.” John Ogbu’s theory that students equate high academic achievement with “acting white” has also generated significant scholarly and popular attention. The concept that black students take an oppositional stance to school learning and underperform in school because to succeed in school is to “act white” has been criticized in recent decades as broad-brushed in its simplicity. Such framing of the black-white achievement gap homogenizes both black and white students. As O’Connor, McNamara Horvat, and Lewis (2006) write, “Focusing on ‘the gap’ provides a reference for marking and subsequently exploring racial inequities. We can use these demarcations to advance policies and reforms aimed at producing equity, so long as we also challenge, complicate, and extend the oversimplified conceptualizations of those phenomena that are said to lie at the heart of the gap” (p. 2). The findings of this study are in line with Tyson’s (2011) conclusion that challenges for African American students lie not with “black culture” but with how we organize our schools. This case study provides a detailed look at one high school’s formal structures and informal patterns of teacher behavior related to the black-white achievement gap, showing that when the school provides institutional support for fostering academic success among students of color and when teachers make their classes emotionally welcoming and instructionally

supportive learning environments, more students of color accept the invitation to rigorous intellectual work.

Equity in AP enrollment. In a study of AP participation in a New Mexico high school, McIlroy (2010) found that if the school failed to develop an institutional value for equity and allowed the inertia of previous practices to remain unchallenged, the school would fail to address equity concerns. Using a lens of critical race theory, McIlroy concluded that teachers' impersonal relationships with students of color and their negative perception of the academic potential of students negatively affected the number of students of color enrolling in AP courses. In contrast, my study employed a pragmatic lens in which I studied the data looking for pockets of success regarding inclusive AP course enrollment practices. This dissertation dovetails with McIlroy's findings, reminding us that school course enrollment practices and personal relationships between teachers and students matter in motivating non-traditional AP students to enroll in AP courses.

Topics for future, related studies

As several subjects in this study indicated, future studies should focus on AP enrollment by gender. Three of the 19 subjects in this study noted that they have more girls than boys in their AP classes; these were teachers of Psychology, Statistics, and Economics. Mr. Edwards noted that his female students are "a great deal more willing than my male students." Gender was not a consideration in this study, but it is an important issue to consider going forward since it is a point of concern raised by the College Board and by several subjects in this study.

Interviewing students, in addition to adult educators, would provide another important lens into course-selection processes. A few subjects in this study recommended future studies of successful pre-AP programs. Non-traditional AP students' grades and AP exam performance are other considerations for future study. While I did collect data on AP exam performance, I chose not to feature such gender differences in my study at the outset for the sake of focus on race and class; however, such data is worthy of future study.

Recommendations

Pushing high school culture to be more equitable and responsive to students' potentialities is not easily done. School administrators need courage to promote policy changes that provide deep learning opportunities for greater numbers of students. They should expect to find resistance from some in the local political community, especially those who are benefitting most from the status quo (Burriss and Garrity, 2008), and resistance from some members of the high school faculty. If the purpose of high school is to put students on successful paths to college and career, then school administrators must examine their practices to determine to what degree they are meeting this purpose and to what degree they are shutting doors, especially as those closed gates affect students of color and those of low SES. Research increasingly shows that more students are capable (Carnevale and Strohl, 2010) of learning at high levels when they are invited and supported in rigorous learning opportunities. Administrators must reward those students who are striving for rigorous preparation for the world beyond high school. In the case of

Lincoln, increasing AP course offerings, instituting Black Scholars, and opening access to AP course enrollment were those courageous actions for equity. Formal academic support structures for non-traditional AP students and parent outreach may be the next administrative steps at Lincoln.

Nearly all learning is based on a relationship between the learner and the learning community. In secondary schooling, this takes the shape of students learning in an environment that is shaped by the classroom teacher. This study clearly indicates that the teachers most successful in creating inclusive, rigorous learning environments make sure that students, especially those in AP courses for the first time, know that their teacher cares about them and their intellectual journey. Beyond teacher inclusivity, some sort of “buddy system” that would allow a striving student to shadow a traditional AP student, perhaps auditing the course one year and taking the course for a grade the next year would facilitate greater access to rigorous courses; having a successful AP student return to a course the following year as a teaching assistant was another suggestion by a progressive teacher in this study. Essential, though, is that the teacher be welcoming and flexible in facilitating learning in his or her class if the teacher is to foster equity.

Summation

The data collected through this study reveal that in efforts to provide greater equity in Advanced Placement course taking, Lincoln HS took three critical institutional steps:

1. Offer a wide variety of AP courses to provide students with a range of subject matter and teacher personalities from which to choose.
2. Build a culture of achievement among students who traditionally are underrepresented in AP coursework. Particularly, the Black Scholars program at Lincoln HS was designed to build a positive peer support culture among students of color.
3. Provide open enrollment to AP courses so that students have the final say regarding the courses they choose to take instead of using standardized test scores and teacher recommendations as gate keepers.

Influential educators at the school have done the following two things to build a culture of inclusion and encouragement for non-traditional AP students:

1. Build a reputation for their courses that is welcoming by recruiting non-traditional students to their AP courses and build a reputation for themselves as teachers that demonstrates a culture of caring for their students.
2. Teach with flexibility in instruction and assessment that takes into account students' academic growth and mastery of the course content and skills.

Taken together, these things have resulted in more diverse enrollment in Lincoln's AP program. Lincoln is not necessarily a model school as more work is needed to continue to create inclusive learning environments in all classes, and all teachers struggle with finding the best balance of flexibility and rigor.

While patterns of within-school segregation often appear entrenched, this school's experience with diversifying AP classes shows that change is possible. As Lareau and Horvat observe, "The process of social reproduction is not a continual,

deterministic one” but a process that can be shaped by school structures and progressive educators (1999, p. 50). In the end, if students have the opportunity to take on challenging coursework like AP and they put in the work to master the course content and skills with the support of excellent teachers, long-term reward is sure to follow.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Equity in Advanced Placement Course Taking: A Case Study of an Inner-Ring Suburban High School

Interview Protocol¹⁰

I'm interested in learning the story of Advanced Placement course taking in this high school. What is your name, your position in the school and your role in the Advanced Placement program here?

What are the benefits to students enrolling in AP courses?

Do you feel there is segregation at the classroom level in this school? Tell me about it.

How are students encouraged/discouraged to enroll in AP? What are the reasons students do/do not enroll in AP courses?

Many school leaders and educators are trying increase access to and equity in upper level, rigorous course work like AP, and that is the subject of this study. Despite that, here is the national data on who takes AP courses and their success on AP tests. Talk about the patterns you perceive and what they mean to you.

Now, let's look at the AP data for this school over the past five years. Talk about the patterns you perceive and what they mean to you.

What can you tell me about students of color and low SES successfully participating in AP? What helps students take on the academically rigorous course work of AP? What are the barriers to these students?

What instructional supports are in place to support students in AP? Are there any special affective or additional adult or peer supports for students from underrepresented groups (race or class)?

What do you think are the keys in this school to supporting a strong AP program for a diverse set of students, by race and class? What are the challenges?

How are students encouraged/discouraged from taking AP exams? How are students prepared for those exams?

¹⁰ All questions on this protocol may not apply to all interviewees.

What are your personal beliefs about detracking and students' course taking practices at this school? What do you think should be the role of the school in addressing equity issues with regard to AP?

Do you think there is a stigma about "acting white" for students of color in this school?

Can you give me an example or two of something that is working/happening here that supports academic rigor for students of color or low SES, as it relates to AP?

What is hard/challenging about trying to provide equity for students of color or low SES in AP?

Are there any groups that have been adversely affected by an expanded AP program?

Is there anything about equity and the AP program at this school that you feel is important that I have not asked about?

Do you have any suggestions as to other people with whom I should be talking to help me understand the AP program here?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participant Informed Consent Form Equity in Advanced Placement Course Taking: A Case Study of an Inner-Ring Suburban High School

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The objective of this dissertation to describe and analyze the school practices in one inner-ring suburban high school regarding equity and excellence in Advanced Placement course-taking. Practitioners (Burriss & Garrity, 2008) and several recent dissertations (McIlroy, 2010; Postuma, 2010; Wood, 2010; King, 2010) have found that schools are beginning to increase access to Advanced Placement courses for underrepresented subgroups of students. There is a link between Advanced Placement success and college success (Dougherty & Mellor, 2009). Further, positive future social and economic outcomes correlate with a college education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The goal of this study is to find school practices that promote high-level course taking for all students, in the interest of equitable opportunity for post-secondary success for students of color and students from low socio-economic status.

Study participants will be asked about their practices and beliefs regarding course taking, particularly as it relates to Advanced Placement courses. The questions will focus on academic preparation needed for success in AP courses, how students are encouraged or discouraged to enroll in certain courses, how students are supported for their success, how students are encouraged or discouraged to take AP exams, how students are prepared for those exams. Participants will also be asked questions about their personal beliefs on students' course taking practices and why students are or are not successful in AP courses.

I am interviewing educators and school leaders in one inner-ring suburban high school. This interview will be about an hour long and will be audio recorded. No real names, including the school's name, will be used in future publications or talks on the research. The identity of each participant and your answers will be kept confidential. We hope that these interviews will benefit the participants by giving them a chance to talk about your experiences and perspectives on this important issue.

While your participation is highly valued, it is, of course, voluntary. You are free to participate or not, or leave the study at any time without penalty. You can refuse to answer any question that is asked of you. If you would like to have further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Mr. Richard Thom, Office of the Vice President for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia PA 19140, or by phoning (215) 707-8757. Questions regarding the study may be addressed to the

doctoral candidate Andrew Kuhn, 7219 Chestnut Ave., Elkins Park, PA 19027, 215-688-7955. The dissertation chair for this study is Maia Cucchiara, Ph.D., 252 Ritter Hall, 1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave. Temple University, ELPS, Philadelphia PA 19122, 215-204-8184.

Participant Informed Consent Form (Page 2)
Equity in Advanced Placement Course Taking: A Case Study of an Inner-Ring Suburban High School

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name (Please Print)

Participant's Signature

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature

Date : _____

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE FORM

Permission to Audiotape

Andrew Kuhn, doctoral candidate
Equity in Advanced Placement Course Taking: A Case Study of an Inner-Ring Suburban High School

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

I give Andrew Kuhn permission to audiotape me.

This audiotape will only be used for the following purpose:

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as data for the dissertation listed above at Temple University. I have already given consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

I understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request the audiotape(s) will no longer be used.

I understand that I will not be compensated for being audiotaped or the use of the audiotapes.

I understand that the audiotape(s) will be archived for a period of three years. If I want more information about the audiotape(s) or I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Andrew Kuhn
7219 Chestnut Ave.
Elkins Park, PA 19027
215-688-7955

Signature Date: _____

Signature Date: _____

This form was placed in my records and a copy was kept by each participant.