

WHY STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN HONORS AND
ADVANCED PLACEMENT CLASSES: THE PHENOMENON IN ONE GEORGIA
HIGH SCHOOL

by
Susan M. Buice
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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April, 2012

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ABSTRACT

WHY STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN HONORS AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT CLASSES: A PHENOMENON IN ONE GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL. (under the direction of Dr. Rick Bragg) School of Education, Liberty University, April, 2012.

The purpose of this study is to determine the causes for high school students' decisions not to enroll in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. This study is a transcendental phenomenology whose participants are students who have been determined to be potentially successful in Advanced Placement classes by the *AP Potential* publication but who have chosen not to take any advanced classes. I will use an initial interest survey, individual interviews, and focus groups in order to gain knowledge from the students about their reasons for choosing not to participate in the Honors/AP classes. After coding the responses, I will have a record of the lived experiences of these students and will use the findings to determine the essence of that experience, thus explaining the phenomenon of underrepresentation at this high school.

Descriptors: Advanced Placement (AP), Honors classes, PSAT, underrepresentation, minority students, low-income students, College Board, *AP Potential*, Social Contagion Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Neighborhood Effects Theory

Dedication

To Becky: my sister, my best friend, and my most avid supporter

Becky, you know that I never would have been able to think about taking on this huge task without you. From the first moment I said, “I think I want to try,” you have been there for me. When I said it was an eight-hour drive to get to the campus, you didn’t hesitate. You gave up your own time and comfort just to help me in this crazy three-year process. Even when I decided to take the weekend classes, you didn’t flinch. I know that driving up on Friday and back on Sunday was so much stress on you, but you were always the positive force. Every time I thought I was going to give up, you motivated me to keep going. You never questioned; you were more positive than I was. This is truly our degree – not just mine.

I know that I don’t thank you enough for all that you do or tell you enough that I am so blessed to have you for my sister. You are my rock, my friend, my role model. I bet Mama and Daddy are looking down and smiling right now to see how close we have become and how much we depend on one another. They are so proud of BOTH of us. By the way, you are better teacher and person than I will ever be. I love you.

Mama and Daddy, this is for you. Because of your sacrifices for us, you made us believe that we could accomplish anything. You made me the person that I am, and I know that you are looking down and smiling right now.

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- To Susan Dreschel whose technological skills saved me when I had no idea how to format a table of contents and who took her own time to answer my questions

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

While the population in schools in the United States is becoming increasingly more culturally and economically diverse, the population in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) programs is remaining almost static. Composed of predominately White, middle to upper class students, Honors and AP class populations are underrepresented by students from minorities and from low socioeconomic (SES) levels (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) stresses that all children must receive the best possible education, but this is not always the case in Honors and AP classes.

The AP program was started in the United States in the 1950s as a way to challenge “high-achieving students at high-status schools” (Schneider, 2009, p. 813). AP classes are college-level courses taught as part of the regular high school curriculum. At the end of the year, students can take an AP examination in the subject to determine if they will receive college credit for the class. However, many universities give preference to students who simply take the AP course even if they do not take the national test at the end of the year or do not score high enough on it to receive college credit (Klopfenstein, 2004, p. 116). The original AP program was based on the principle “that all students are not created equal” (cited in Schneider, 2009, p. 817), so only the most select students from the most prestigious preparatory schools were chosen to participate. Though the AP program expanded to more schools in the 1960s, the elitist nature of the program was still recognized but rarely questioned until the beginning of the 1970s when AP programs

began to be recognized as havens for White, upper-class students, “exacerbating inequality” and touching on “institutional racism” (Schneider, 2009, pp. 819, 820).

The arrival of the 21st century also brought the arrival of a new philosophy concerning student participation in AP classes. No longer were barriers placed on enrollment in AP classes; a push was made to add greater diversity to the AP population. According to *The AP Equity Policy Statement* (2011), “all students deserve an opportunity to participate in rigorous and academically challenging courses and programs,” and The College Board “encourage[s] the elimination of barriers that restrict... students from ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the AP Program in the past.” The final statement in the policy states that schools must “make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population” (College Board, 2011a).

Though the belief that AP doors should be open to all students is widely espoused, the reality is that these programs are still underrepresented by students from minorities and low socioeconomic levels (Moore & Slate, 2008, p. 63). This is especially troubling since many of the students who could benefit most from the study skills, writing skills, and college preparation that AP classes offer are the very ones not taking advantage of the AP program (Vaughn, 2010). The purpose of this study is to try to determine why this phenomenon is taking place.

Many studies have been conducted showing that the referral and placement process of students into the gifted program is often limited because of teachers’ hesitation to identify giftedness in students who are culturally diverse or who have low socioeconomic levels (SES), thereby denying many students the specialized education

that should be afforded to them. These studies stress that minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are most often underrepresented in gifted programs and classes, not because of their lack of ability, but because of flaws in the referral and identification processes (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Gallagher, 2005; McBee, 2006; Miller, 2009; Staiger, 2004; Tomlinson, 2004; Van Tassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007; Yoon & Gentry, 2009).

However, students in high school do not have to be identified as gifted in order to enroll in Honors and AP classes. They can choose on their own accord if they want to take an Honors or AP class. Even so, Honors and AP classes still serve very few minority and low-income students (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). While a great deal of research has been conducted about elementary and middle school gifted students, very few studies have been conducted about the high school phenomenon of underrepresentation of students in Honors and AP classes, especially from the viewpoint of the students. This study delves more deeply into this phenomenon in order to determine the dynamics that cause this underrepresentation in one high school's Honors and AP program.

This study is relevant. Past research has shown that students who participate in Honors and AP courses are more likely not only to be successful in their first year of college (College Board, 2011b; Preston, 2009; Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010), but also “to complete a bachelor's degree in four or fewer years” (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 3) or even in a “timely manner” of “within six years” (McCauley, 2007, p. 1). Participation in AP classes has also been shown to be an important factor in

the students' future financial success and job marketability (Flowers, 2008). However, schools with many minority and low-income students, such as the one in this study, do not have a high rate of participation in Honors and AP classes (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). Klopfenstein (2004) states that low income reduces AP participation by 40% and that while "low income diminishes AP participation of students from all races...Black and Hispanic students are three times more likely to be low-income than White students" (p. 130). Therefore, participation in AP classes is extremely important to the financial futures of these students.

Based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, Crane's social contagion theory, and Galster's neighborhood effects theory, one can theorize that many students may choose not to participate in advanced classes because they may feel they will not be successful or that they do not belong. Therefore, more current research is focusing on the need to reach out to all students in order to make them feel comfortable in Honors/AP classes and to offer them a greater chance to be successful in college and in life.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students who have the potential to be successful in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are choosing to take less rigorous courses even though the advanced classes will better prepare them for success in college and in future careers. While the trend of offering Honors and Advanced Placement classes to all high school students is increasing, the population of students choosing to take these classes is not growing in proportion. In addition, the economic and cultural diversity of students in many school systems is changing dramatically. However, most advanced classes are not reflective of these changes. Because success in college has been linked to success in high

school AP courses, the problem is how to increase enrollment in high school AP classes so that more students are given a chance to experience success in college and in life.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons why students choose not to take Honors and AP classes even though they have been identified by the College Board's *AP Potential* publication as having the potential to be successful in these advanced classes. The study will consider if teachers and/or counselors fail to encourage students to take these classes. The study will also consider whether or not the cultural attitudes of these students could be primary contributors to the lack of student enrollment in higher level courses. Lastly, this study will consider if the students' past educational experiences have dissuaded them from taking more rigorous courses.

Research has shown that Advanced Placement classes can benefit students in several ways. First, AP students are more likely to attend college than those students who do not take Advanced Placement courses. Also, AP courses have become "an essential ingredient, if not a virtual requirement, for students to be accepted by selective colleges and universities" (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2012, p. 5). In turn, those AP students who do attend college are more likely to receive college scholarships. Thirty-one percent of colleges look at participation in AP courses when determining scholarship awards (College Board, 2011c). Also, AP students are more likely to graduate from college in four years, again saving them the money that an extra year of college will cost (College Board, 2011c; Shiu, Kettler, & Johnsen, 2009, p. 61). Finally, statistics show that within the next two to three years, the majority of all jobs will require some type of college education (Carnevale, 2008; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 2).

Therefore, more students must receive some type of college education in order to ensure a successful career in their future. These facts are especially vital for students from minority and low-income families.

Many of the minority students at the high school in this study are first-generation immigrants. They often work to help support their families who arrived here with nothing more than hope for the futures of their children. Enabling these students to attend a postsecondary school could be the beginnings of that future. Honors and AP classes may help to bridge the gap between the two populations, and schools must look at ways to ensure that all students receive an equal chance to excel in the classes that will best prepare them for their futures.

If more students are placed in AP classes because of this study, if more students receive greater learning opportunities because of this study, and if more minority and low-income students are able to attend college because of this study, then the importance of the study is clear.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that the findings could impact the lives of the students for years to come. According to recent studies, “nearly two-thirds of jobs in 2014 will require at least some college” education; however, only 25% of the population entering the work force will have a college degree (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 1). The fact that only one-quarter of the population obtains a college degree may be caused in part because of the students’ lack of preparation for college academics. Many students pass the regular high school curriculum, but once they enter college, they do not have the necessary skills to be successful. Therefore, they are

forced to take remedial classes, creating a feeling of failure at the beginning of their college careers, which may, in turn, cause them to drop out of college (McCauley, 2007). Further studies have shown that students who participate in a rigorous high school curriculum, including AP classes, are more likely to have the skills to be successful in college and to earn a degree with a four to six year time frame (Flowers, 2008; Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan 2008; McCauley, 2007; Vaughn, 2010; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009).

In addition, many universities take students' participation in AP classes into consideration when determining acceptance into the university, and "nearly one-third of colleges and universities use AP as a criterion to determine scholarship recipients" (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). With this being said, Honors and AP courses seem to be one of the best college preparation strategies for high school students. However, the doors to these rigorous classes are closed to many of the students who could benefit from them the most. Research has been conducted to prove the impact of AP courses on college success (Flowers, 2008; McCauley, 2007; Preston, 2009; Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009) and to prove that there is a problem with underrepresentation of certain populations in AP classes (Klopfenstein, 2004; Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Whiting & Ford, 2009). However, there is a gap in the research as to why students are choosing not to enroll in Honors/AP classes.

The school in this study has a low-income, ethnically diverse population. While 18 AP courses are offered at this school, the population of those classes is predominately White, middle to upper class. If the key to having a successful future and to breaking the

poverty cycle is education, then all students must have the key to the best educational opportunities. This study will directly speak to the students involved, with an attempt to discover what restraints are keeping them from enrolling in Honors/AP classes. Hopefully, the findings will allow some of those restraints to be lessened, opening the doors of Honors/AP classes and guiding students to a more successful future.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this study:

1. Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?

This question is vital because research has shown that Honor/AP courses provide “superior” learning environments and better prepare students to be successful in college (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, pp. 200, 204). However, many students are choosing not to enroll in courses that will give them a greater predicted success in college and in the future (Flowers, 2008; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). This study will attempt to determine why these students at this one school are choosing not to enroll in these rigorous academic classes. I will determine if the results of this study back up the finding in the established research.

2. How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?

Research has shown that teachers often fail to recognize giftedness in students who are not of their own culture (Miller, 2009). It has also been shown that teachers often evaluate students from minority backgrounds and low

socioeconomic levels in a biased manner, referring mainly White, middle to upper class students to advanced academic classes (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Flowers, 2008). Since many students in this study are from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds, the study will attempt to determine if teacher bias played a role in the lack of representation of these students in Honors/AP classes. Again, research provides the basis for the formation of my research question. My research study will determine if the phenomenon at this school supports that established research.

3. How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes?

Based on the neighborhood effects theory (Galster, 2010), many students may have a negative perception of academically rigorous courses if their family and peers have a negative perception. Not wanting to be ostracized from the people who most influence their lives outside of school, these students may not want to take any classes that will separate them from their peers and distance them from their families. This study will attempt to determine if outside influences, including family and friends, have caused students to have a bias against Honors/AP classes.

4. How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes?

Since many students who participate in Honors/AP courses have been together in gifted courses since elementary school, students who have not been in gifted classes in the past may feel that they will not fit in with students in Honors/AP

classes or that they have not been prepared to keep up with the rigorous curriculum (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). This study will attempt to determine if past educational experiences of these students have kept them from enrolling in Honors/AP courses.

The research will focus on finding the answer to one central question – Question 1. Questions 2, 3, and 4 support the current research findings and will be used to determine if the participants in this phenomenon are impacted in the same manner as the participants in past research or whether new insights will be gained into the phenomenon.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. This research will be limited in scope since it will select the participants from only one high school. A transcendental phenomenology will be used because I am not only the researcher but also a teacher in this school; therefore, I must be careful to bracket my emotions and to only report the results, not interpret them. Therefore, this research will be a call for attention more than a call for action.

Delimitations. The participants in this study will be those students who are listed in the College Board's (2010a) *AP Potential* publication. This publication lists students who, based on their PSAT results, have a 60% chance of scoring the mastery level of 3 or above on an AP test (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). The use of this list will provide an unbiased list of students who do have the potential to succeed in advanced classes, thereby giving a purposeful sampling population.

Research Plan

This study is a qualitative study following the transcendental phenomenology design outlined by Moustakas in 1994 (Creswell, 2006, p. 60). Students who are listed in

the College Board's *AP Potential* as being predicted to be successful in AP classes will be the participants in the study. Using a criterion sampling, the students will then be further narrowed to those who are listed in the *AP Potential* but who have never taken an AP course or who are not currently taking an Honors course. Through individual interviews and focus groups, I will use coding to determine the patterns or themes indicating reasons why these students have chosen not to participate in Honors/AP classes.

A phenomenology is vital to this study. The vast majority of research about the need for and the impact of AP classes had been published by the College Board, the same institution that oversees the exam (McCauley, 2007; Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010). However, very little research has been done from the viewpoint of those whom the study most impacts – the students. A phenomenology is necessary so that the students' voices can be heard and can provide a missing but vital link in the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section looks at the studies that have been completed concerning the underrepresentation of students, especially minority and low-income students, in gifted classes as well as in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) stresses that all children must receive the best possible education, leaving no child behind. However, even with this mandate, many students are still being left behind and underrepresented in the gifted program (Klopfenstein, 2004; McBee, 2006; Miller, 2009; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009).

The need to include underrepresented students in gifted classes has been called for since 1936 when Jenkins first noted the discrepancy (as cited in Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997, p. 201). Then just over two decades ago, the U.S. Department of Education, in *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993), challenged American schools to find the “outstanding talents [that] are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor” (p. 19). Twenty-eight years later, the United States is even more diverse, but yet the challenge to “find the talents” of all students is still lagging behind.

While much research has been done to determine why this underrepresentation still exists, most of the research deals with elementary and middle school gifted students (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006; Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997; Ford & Whiting, 2008; Gallagher, 2005; Matthews, Foster, Gladstone, Schieck, & Meiners, 2007; McBee, 2006; Miller, 2009; Pendarvis & Wood,

2009; Tomlinson, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007; Whiting & Ford, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). However, many of the studies still provide a solid background for the work of this research study concerning high school Honors/AP classes. What this literature review does point out, however, is the need for more research on the high school level since very little exists.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on an ontological assumption. Since I will be looking at the viewpoints of a variety of students from a variety of backgrounds, I know that they will each bring their own realities to the study. Though they share the same school environment, my reality is obviously different from the reality of the students as well, so my goal is to determine the nature of their reality.

My first worldview will always be a Biblical view. As a human being first, and as a teacher, I believe that teachers and schools must accept all students (Acts 10: 34-35, *NIV*), encourage all students to excel to the best of their abilities (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and give all students hope for the future (Jeremiah 29:11). My Biblical worldview then leads directly to an advocacy/participatory worldview. I want to change the lives of some of the underrepresented students and to reform the Honors/AP class populations at my school, beginning with this research study. By giving these students a voice, then these changes may be made.

Theoretical Framework

Social cognition theory. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the work of a variety of researchers in both the theoretical field and the gifted field. Albert Bandura developed the social cognition theory that states that “people learn through

observing other's behaviors" (Learning theories database). He states that there is a "reciprocal determinism" wherein the world and a person's behavior cause one another (Learning theories database). This interaction leads to a person's self-efficacy. Since many minority and low-income students come from an environment where rigorous classes may not be a part of the focus of their community or their family members' lives, then they may not have the belief that they will be successful in Honors/AP classes. This may lead to their decisions to choose not to take advanced classes.

Social contagion theory. On this same note, Joseph's Crane social contagion theory stresses that "like begets like" (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2005). His theory supports the point that a child's neighborhood impacts what he expects for himself. Because of the "role of imitation, modeling, and social learning from a child's neighborhood peers," if most of the students in a neighborhood do not see the importance of a rigorous education, then those students who do see this importance run the risk of being outcast from the community and even from their families (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2005). This may also account for the number of minority and low-income students who choose not to participate in Honors and AP classes.

Neighborhood effects theory. An off-shoot of Crane's social contagion theory, George Galster's neighborhood effects theory further explores the connection between the child's neighborhood and his academic success. While Galster (2010) agrees that socialization within the neighborhood has a dramatic impact on a child's view of education, he also stresses that the physical environment, the geographical location, and the interaction between the members of the neighborhood and local institutions also

affect a child's viewpoint of himself and the world. The higher the "dosage" of negative influences from the neighborhood, the more likely the student is to view education in a negative light. This may cause the student to shy away from those courses, such as Honors and AP courses, that could provide the "antidote" to could lead him away from the neighborhood that has defined him.

Donna Ford. Since the 1990s, Donna Ford has been in the forefront of studying underrepresentation in gifted classes. By 2008, she had "authored over 100 articles" and "made more than 500 presentations" on underrepresentation in gifted classes (Henshon, 2008, p. 208). In her research, Ford stresses that culture does matter, and she provides background information so that researchers are grounded in theories that will help them guide their interpretations. She also stresses that while research has been conducted in urban areas, more research about underrepresentation must be done in suburban and rural areas, the setting for this research (Henshon, 2008, p. 210).

Matthew McBee. Matthew McBee is one of the leading voices of gifted education in Georgia, the state where this research will take place. McBee's main research focuses on the referral process. In a 2006 research study, McBee found that, overall, 12.3% of Caucasian students in Georgia were identified as gifted as opposed to 3.2% of African American students and 2.3% of Hispanic students (p. 106). One primary source for referral of students to the gifted program is teacher recommendation. Students who do not receive a referral will never enter the program, so the referral process is "an obvious potential source of unfairness (McBee, 2006, p. 103). While students can choose to take Honors/AP courses themselves in high school, teacher support and encouragement

can still be a vital part in a student's belief in himself and his ability to participate in these advanced classes.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska. Joyce VanTassel-Baska leads the research in the study of low-income gifted students (Henshon, 2008, p. 209). Since approximately 40% of the students in this school come from low-income families, many students have jobs to help support their families. VanTassel-Baska's research into how income level impacts student participation is the cornerstone on which to build research in order to determine if and how income affects the students' participation in Honors and AP classes.

Review of the Literature

History of underrepresentation in gifted classes. The *Javits Act of 1994* recognized the "potential loss of talent" if culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students were not recruited and retained in the gifted program (as cited in Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, pp. 291-292). It also called for schools to give "highest priority" to serving and meeting the needs of these students (as cited in Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997, p. 203).

In order to accommodate all students, most states have adopted written policies that "call for recognition, identification, and service for all students, including underrepresented gifted students" (Miller, 2009, p. 65). However, underrepresentation still exists. This lack of balance may come from standardized test bias, from lack of follow-through on state mandates, or simply from the students' own choices. However, teacher nomination issues, including the "lack of understanding between the culture of the majority and that of the minority, [have also] stymied the progress" of identifying students from the underrepresented populations (Miller, 2009, pp. 65-66).

In a study conducted by Yoon and Gentry (2006), an examination of the *Civil Rights Data Collection* of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) found that in gifted programs nationwide, Hispanic and African American students have been continuously underrepresented in the gifted population since 1978. Specific state data also showed that in 2006, Hispanic students were underrepresented in 43 of the 50 states, and African American students were underrepresented in 42 of the 50 states. This can be directly compared to the data from the same study that showed that Caucasian students were overrepresented in 26 of the 50 states, thereby documenting the discrepancy of the inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in gifted programs (pp. 125-128).

Equally important is the fact that current trends in minority representation are moving backwards instead of forward. While states were found to be closing the “equality and excellence gaps” in 2006, by 2007, only one state had closed this gap for Black students, showing that equity is “not moving in the right direction” (Whiting & Ford, 2009, p. 23). While some states, including Georgia, have recently partnered with the College Board to increase the number of minority and low-income students in AP classes, only “16 percent of low-income students” nationwide have taken an AP course (Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010, p 27), and minority students are still underrepresented (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). In the most recently released *AP Report to the Nation* (College Board, 2012), statistics show that 80% of Black African Americans who have potential to succeed in an AP course do not take the recommended AP subject. This is followed closely by underrepresentation of 73.7% of Native American students, 70.4% of Hispanic students, and even 61.6% of White students (p. 17).

Importance of AP classes to postsecondary education. Advanced Placement (AP) courses were started in the 1950's in order to keep "bright students in their home schools" (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007, p. 176). Since that time, AP classes have expanded to almost every high school in the United States. The role of the high school is to prepare seniors for success in college and in their future careers. According to Ndura, Robinson, and Ochs (2003), one of the greatest indicators of future college attendance and economic success is taking AP courses (p. 22). Once they are in college, students who took AP courses in high school continue to make "significantly higher grades" and to be more successful than students who took general education classes (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 200). College drop-out rates are also lower among students who took AP courses (Preston, 2009, p. 38), and students who take AP courses are more likely to graduate from college within an expected time frame (College Board, 2011, p. 3). Because of their ubiquity, AP classes have become the "proxy for accomplishment" in high schools (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003, p. 180).

Importance of AP classes to future financial success. Lamont Flowers (2008) used the *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988* (NELS: 88/2000) to research AP participation's role in determining labor market outcomes. Flowers, basing his conclusions on the human capital theory, states that "an individual's educational and labor market outcomes are positively influenced by attaining academic and social skills" (p. 123). He further states that since previous research has shown that education is "the most significant investment an individual can make to accumulate higher levels of human capital" (p. 123), the students who participate in AP programs would be more apt to have more advanced education and, in turn, higher labor market outcomes (p. 123).

Based on the results of the NELS: 88/2000, Flowers (2008) found that students who participated in AP classes were “more likely to score higher on a college entrance exam” (p. 125) than those students who did not participate in AP classes. This was especially true for Black and Hispanic students who “scored more than 100 points higher on the college entrance exam” (p. 125) than did their counterparts who did not take AP classes. In addition, White students who participated in the AP program scored 174 points higher on the entrance exam (p. 126). Thus, Flowers’ conclusion shows that students who participate in the AP program have college entrance examination scores that allow them to qualify for entrance into more colleges than their peers who do not take AP courses.

Another finding in Flowers’ (2008) study is that all students who participated in AP courses, whether they were White, Black, or Hispanic, were more likely to earn a bachelor’s or advanced degree (p. 127), thereby leading to higher future income levels. He concluded his study with the statement that based on the findings of the twelve-year study, “participating in AP programs in high school appears to be another important factor of long-term educational and financial success” (p. 129). If this is the case, then more students need to be given the opportunity to participate in the AP program in order to increase their opportunities for educational and financial success.

Students’ perceptions of Honors/AP classes. Those students who do take advanced classes support the importance of these classes in their education. In a study by Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008), students who were enrolled in AP and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes were interviewed about their perceptions of the most important elements of advanced classes.

First, the students stated that the work in advanced classes was more challenging and more difficult than the courses in the regular curriculum. AP and IB courses gave these students an “escape from the drudgery of less challenging” general track courses (p. 202). The students also cited a “grave mismatch” (p. 202) between their needs and the work in the general classes. AP courses provided these students more opportunities for critical thinking and gave them “the best education their high schools had to offer” (p. 203).

Better learning environment and teachers. One of the reasons that students find that Honors/AP classrooms provide a “superior” learning environment is the fact that they are surrounded by other students with the same work ethic, and they encourage each other to work harder to succeed (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 204). Many students stress that the learning environment is different in advanced classes because in regular classes they are surrounded by “students who do not want to learn” and are learning from teachers who do not “understand their desire for challenge” (p. 204). This alone shows the disparity between advanced classes and the classes in the regular curriculum, and it highlights the need to help students find the best fit in order to ensure that they receive the challenges that they need in the classroom.

To add greater disparity, many students feel that the teachers who teach advanced classes are the “best teachers in the school” (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 203). The students describe these teachers as “dedicated, hardworking, skilled, and knowledgeable” (p. 203). The students also perceive that advanced classes are often taught by more experienced teachers, and their years of experience make these teachers more comfortable with their subject and with their students (p. 203). These teachers also

tend to treat their students more like adults, providing a relationship and a work environment that is much different from the regular classroom (p. 209). While this is a great asset for the students who are participating in Honors/AP classes, this phenomenon leads to a new concern: if the best teachers are reaching the smallest number of students, then more must be done to allow a greater number of students to have access to these teachers as well.

Social effects of enrollment in Honors and AP classes. While there are obvious academic and financial impacts of taking AP courses, the social effects can be even more vital to high school students. Shiu, Kettler, and Johnsen (2009) found that Hispanic “students enrolled in the AP courses made friends with peers who cared more about grades, enjoyed reading in English, and were optimistic about their future family, future job, and their service to the community” (p. 59). These students also created an “academically supportive peer group” (p. 59) who offered support when their “parents [were] not able to help their children due to language or cultural barriers or due to lack of access to school information” (p. 63). These students developed a “sense of belonging” (p.75), and the students who participated in one AP course were more likely to stay in school and to continue to take an Honors/AP track because AP provided them the “needed gateway to academic success” (p. 77).

Exclusivity of Honors/AP classes. The benefits of taking Honors/AP courses are significant, but if this is the case, then why are so many students being excluded from these advanced classes? Because gifted education is not federally mandated, there is much room for variation in the definition of “giftedness” (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, p. 290). The beginnings of the concept began in 1865 when Francis Galton

published his first article about “individual difference in ability” (as cited in White, 2005, p. 424). With his theory of intellectual superiority of some individuals, the concept of giftedness began. Even though years of research have been completed, the definition still remains elusive. Perhaps this is because giftedness is not always a “verifiable reality,” but rather the gifted program is just a means to identify “students who are ill served by general education, [caused by] the desire to create safe havens for some students, and the desire to maintain an educational privilege within public schools” (Tomlinson, 2004, pp. 516-517). With this desire to create a safe haven and a place of privilege, the gifted program has become more and more exclusive.

This exclusive nature is further exacerbated by the fact that gifted and Honors/AP classes are mainly filled with White, middle to upper class students, leaving some critics to view gifted and advanced programs as a means of “resegregating the schools” so that the best education goes to “the children of rich white parents,” thus denying an equal opportunity to minority students (Gallagher, 2005, p. 135). This has become such a paradigm that in some studies, “whiteness as giftedness” has become a mantra for those critics who feel that gifted identification has become a means for orchestrating this new segregation (Staiger, 2004, p. 161). Additional studies stress that gifted and AP programs segregate not only racially, but also economically, linguistically, and culturally as well (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, p. 292).

Underrepresentation in Honors and AP classes. In 2006, Yoon and Gentry proved that underrepresentation is not a new problem, but despite efforts to alleviate the problem, it still exists. A separate study conducted by the College Board (2008) looked at the number of minority students who took Advanced Placement (AP) examinations in

2007. This study found that while all minorities are underrepresented, the greatest concern came from Black students who were underrepresented by almost 50%. The study found that Black students made up 16.88% of the general school population in U.S. schools in 2007, but only 8.99% of these Black students were served in advanced classes. This means that “at least 153,000 additional Black students should be in gifted education classes” (Whiting & Ford, 2009, p. 23). New data indicate that Black African American 2011 high school graduates were the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms (College Board, 2012). Based on the College Board’s findings, four out of every five Black/African American graduates in 2011 “did not participate in the class for which they had potential” (p. 17). Studies have also found that 51% of students from high-income homes have taken rigorous courses, such as AP courses; however, only 16% of those from low-income homes have taken advantage of the same academic opportunities (Wakelyn, D. & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 3).

Impact of teacher biases on student participation. In order to increase equality in advanced classes, one area on which to place focus is a teacher recommendation. Since giftedness is usually “defined and measured by the majority culture” (Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006, p. 135), teachers often fail to identify academically gifted students who are not of their own culture, and their “beliefs about giftedness” are “colored by cultural perceptions” (Miller, 2009, p. 65-66). This lack of understanding of different cultures is exacerbated by the fact that the cultural make-up of the teaching staff is often far different from that of the student body. The majority of U.S. teachers (80% to 90%) are Caucasian (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26). According to *The 2009 Statistical Abstract*, 70% of the students aged 5-19 are Caucasian, 16% are African

American, and 19% are Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). More importantly, however, the population of the United States is growing more culturally diverse each year. Based on a 2003 study by Cushner, McClelland, and Stafford, by the year 2040, “children from different culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are expected to be the majority in classrooms” (as cited in Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26).

With the culturally rich school population growing each year, school systems must begin to address the lack of referrals of these minority students to the Honors/AP program. While ethnicity should not determine a child’s referral to advanced classes, studies have shown that teachers have “negative stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions of children from different cultural backgrounds” (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26). Further studies also indicate that students from minority backgrounds and low socioeconomic levels are often evaluated in a biased manner when teachers rank academic achievement and behavior (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26). In fact, one study even found that teachers who are of a different cultural background than their students often view “culture-specific behaviors as reflecting cultural deficits rather than a source of giftedness” (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007, p. 220). This bias is not deliberate on the teachers’ part. Often, teachers just have “internal unexamined conceptions of what it means to be gifted” (Miller, 2009, p. 67).

Impact of students’ socioeconomic level on participation. A student’s socioeconomic level may also contribute to the teacher’s lack of referral to Honors/AP classes. Students who do not receive free or reduced lunch are three times more likely to

be referred to gifted or advanced classes than those who do (McBee, 2006, p. 106). In a study by Peterson and Margolin, teachers were asked to identify and list characteristics of gifted students. Some teachers actually mentioned in the study that being from a middle to upper class home made the child more likely to be gifted (cited in Miller, 2009, p. 67). In a separate study, teachers watched or listened to videotapes of students, and they were then told to rate the students' giftedness. White middle class students were consistently rated more favorably than White students from lower socioeconomic levels (cited in Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26). Even in high school when students may choose on their own to take advanced classes, students from low-income families are 40% less likely to participate in AP classes (Klopfenstein, 2004, p. 123).

Impact of racial stereotype threats on participation. Ironically, high school students themselves may play the greatest role in fostering underrepresentation of minority and low-income students in Honors and AP classes. This is especially true of Black males. Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008b), in their study of gifted Black young men, stressed that while many studies have been conducted “about students” not participating in advanced classes, very little has been “collected from them” (p. 224). Students are the ones living the experience, and it does not matter what situations may seem to be to educators, administrators, or other onlookers; the only important viewpoint is what the students “perceive the situation to be” (p. 224). Therefore, researchers must listen to the students' voices since their perceptions are vital in understanding the underrepresentation in Honors/AP classes.

In their study, Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008b) found that while many Black students have the ability to do well in school, many do not put forth the “effort necessary

to achieve at high levels” (p. 221). Part of that lack of effort comes from their perception of “stereotype threats” (p. 223). The results of the study found that these young men chose not to participate in Honors/AP classes because they would be perceived as “acting White” by their peers (p. 221). Many also did not believe that they could do well in the advanced classes because they would not fit in; they felt they would have no friends in the classes, and they thought that the teachers would have “low expectations of them academically, intellectually, and socially” (p. 224). Perhaps most important to these young men, they did not want to take Honors/AP classes because they ran the risk of being totally ostracized. They felt that they would be ostracized by the students within the classroom, and they feared that they would be ostracized by their Black friends outside of the class and by the rest of their community for “acting White” by participating in advanced classes.

If students do not perceive any winning scenarios from taking Honors/AP classes, then they will not run the risk of losing their identity for that class. “The desire to have friends and to be popular, as well as to avoid alienation, isolation, and rejection,” (Ford, Grantham, and Whiting, 2008b, p. 223) may be key in their decision to avoid advanced classes. This is especially true when many feel that their education may not lead them to success in a world full of “such social injustices as prejudice and discrimination” (p. 220).

Impact of neighborhood effects. Galster (2010) uses the neighborhood effects theory to explain why many students from minority or low-income neighborhoods are often their own cause of underrepresentation in advanced classes (p. 2). Galster theorizes that social contagion causes members of a neighborhood to take on the attitude of those

around them. This becomes an “epidemic,” leading to the widespread pattern of beliefs and behaviors. If students are raised in an area where education is not valued, they, too, will not value education. Through collective socialization and social networking, students are “encouraged to conform to like social norms” of the neighborhood (p. 2). Those who break away from the social norms may be ostracized because of their differences, especially if those achievements bring them educational or socioeconomic success (p. 2).

Galster further contends that the higher the “dose of the neighborhood,” the harder it is for schools to provide an “antidote” for this learned behavior (pp. 3-4). Therefore, by the time students reach the high school level, the neighborhood effect is so ingrained in them that schools may find it almost impossible to reach these students, even though the education is what will lead them to success in the future and to a possible escape from the neighborhood effect. This holds especially true for Honors/AP courses that pull gifted students away from classes with other students from their neighborhood and places them in a new setting. The present fear of forming a new neighborhood may outweigh any hopes for the future that the advanced learning environment may provide.

Impact of perception of AP challenges on participation. Some of the very characteristics that draw students to take advanced classes are the same characteristics that drive others away, and these perceptions have nothing to do with ethnicity or socioeconomic level. The challenges of the courses bring with them a workload that is equally challenging. Students indicate that keeping up with the work interferes with their regular lives. They are not willing to give up a social life, television, and sleep in order

to do the amount of work required in Honors/AP classes (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 203).

The tight-knit atmosphere also provides restrictions for new students. The students in advanced classes have often been together in gifted classes since elementary or middle school. Therefore, many students, especially minority students, feel “isolated and different from the other students” (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 206). This unintentional ostracizing is even more pronounced when these new students enter with weaker skills caused by lack of exposure to an advanced curriculum. The fact that they may never be able to catch up with the skills of the other students deters many students from taking advanced courses (p. 206).

Different stakes. For those students who do choose to take Honors/AP courses, the stakes can be very high. While “getting into a good college” is mentioned by almost all students as a reason for taking advanced courses, there are different stakes for different groups (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 208). Students from rural areas, low socioeconomic backgrounds, and minorities have higher stakes for taking AP courses. For many, they want to be the first in their families to graduate from college, and they see AP courses as the best way to get accomplish that goal. For others, it is a chance to “escape a lifestyle” they do not want (p. 208). For still others, they hope to “disprove the stereotype” that is often placed on minority students (p. 208). Perhaps one student best summed up the feeling of many by stating that “AP represents a better future, a chance to succeed so that our dreams come true” (p. 209).

In 1999, two lawsuits brought attention to the need to diversify Advanced Placement classes. *Daniel et al. v. State of California* argued that the lack of availability

and the lack of encouragement to take AP classes put minority students at a disadvantage. *Castaneda et al. v. University of California Regents* found that Black, Latino, and Pilipino applicants were at a disadvantage for college admission because of lack of access to AP courses (as cited in Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002, pp. 224-225). However, even lawsuits did not bring about the anticipated changes.

Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) found that in schools with both a high enrollment in AP classes and a high enrollment of Hispanic students, the minority students were still underrepresented, creating a “schools within schools” phenomenon (p. 224). Students who do not take AP classes “are at a distinct disadvantage” for acceptance into college; therefore, schools are not providing all students with same curriculum and are, in essence, setting up these students for failure (p. 224).

Call for changes. The scope of Honors and AP courses must be broadened in order to provide equal access for all students. It has been proven that students who participate in AP courses have better grade point averages, receive a more challenging education, form a close-knit community of friends, gain admission to more prestigious colleges, save money on tuition in college, and have a better chance of completing college successfully (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 211). The exclusion of more students from the AP program will deny them these benefits and will only further widen the achievement gap that is plaguing this county’s educational system (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008b, p. 233).

In order to alleviate this gap, school systems must work together to identify all gifted students at an early age so that they will be a part of the program, not apart from it. Information needs to be sent out into the community to educate the parents as well as the

students. A study by Ndura, Robinson, and Ochs (2003) found that minority students who did not enroll in advanced classes were most influenced by their parents and that there was a positive correlation between AP enrollment and family income (p. 31). Since many minority students are also from low-income families, this sheds even more light on the need to educate the families so that these students will be given an equal chance at the education they deserve.

Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008) said that “who enrolls in and who does not enroll in and who persists or does not persist in AP courses . . . mirrors a school and community’s commitment to equity and excellence” (p. 211). They also stated that those students who need the advanced courses most, or for whom the stakes are highest, are often the ones most underrepresented (p. 209). All students must be given a fair and equal chance to excel in school. There definitely must be a call to change current practices in order to provide the best learning environment for all students.

Using AP Potential to include more students in the AP program. One way that schools can identify more students for participation in the Honors/ AP program is through the use of *AP Potential*. The Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is a practice college entrance exam given to students before they take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The PSAT “measures skills in verbal reasoning, critical reasoning, math problem solving, and writing” (Vaughn, 2010, p. 396). The College Board has published several research studies that show “strong correlations between students’ PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP examination results” (College Board, 2011a). Based on that research, The College Board began to provide schools with a list of all students’ PSAT scores as well as information

on the students' performance in each content area. The list, called *AP Potential*, is a web-based tool that helps schools identify possible AP students. Based on each student's PSAT results, The College Board predicts from one to twenty-five areas where the student has, based on his test results, at least a 70% chance of passing the AP subject test(s) with a score of 3 or higher out of 5, thus receiving possible college credit while he is still in high school (College Board, 2011a). This study is sent free of charge to all schools who administer the PSAT to their students.

The use of PSAT scores to determine *AP Potential* is important because the scores call to attention "students who may not have been initially considered for AP courses through teacher nomination, self-nomination, or other local procedures" (Camara and Millsap, 1998, p. 22). Though not all students on the list will be successful in AP courses, a "much larger proportion of students are likely to be successful if they are identified early and given the opportunity and support needed to succeed" (Ewing, Camara, & Millsap, 2006, p. 28). The *AP Potential* is an important tool because it gives schools a starting point, allowing them to reach out to students who may have been underserved their entire school lives.

Revamping educational perspectives. Whiting and Ford (2009) advocate the use of the "AEIOUs of change" to help alleviate underrepresentation (p. 24). Through the use of advocacy, education, information, opportunity, and understanding, schools should be able to eliminate the problem of underrepresentation. The first recommendation for the AEIOU program is for the early identification of gifted minority and low socioeconomic (SES) students. If these students are identified as early as preschool and have advocates throughout their education careers, the underrepresentation

problem will be dramatically decreased. Second, students must be taught throughout their educational careers to advocate for themselves. If mentors and role models help these students “see themselves as scholars,” and if they are given study support, they will be more motivated to participate in gifted/AP programs (Whiting & Ford, 2009, p. 25).

The third AEIOU recommendation is that more data must be collected and more information must be disseminated, including the reasons for underrepresentation, in order to allow educators to see and to help fix the gaps. Fourth, families of these students must become partners in the students’ educational process. Once parents are made aware of the importance of gifted and AP classes, they will be more apt to support and encourage the students. Finally, the “cultural competence” of educators must be increased through workshops and university classes in order to challenge their stereotypes and biases of students from minorities and low socioeconomic levels (Whiting & Ford, 2009, pp. 25-26).

Christian perspective. Perhaps the greatest call for equality comes from Christian ideals. David Purpel (2008) has long been a professor of education and a supervisor of student teachers. However, in his keynote speech at the Kuyers Institute in 2007, he brought out the point that schools are asking the wrong questions and teaching the wrong curriculum. According to Purpel, current schools are “manifestations for social theories and political programs,” causing some students to be considered better than others and some teachers to stress being smart instead of being wise (p. 120).

By looking to religion for wisdom, Purpel (2008) stresses that teachers can advocate excellence, helping all children, including those of different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels, to “fully develop their God-given talents” (p. 122). He further

contends that while excellence can be measured by “high test scores [and] placement in advanced level courses,” that excellence should not be achieved because some students are deemed more deserving than others, possibly through “wealth, . . . class, . . . gender, or race” (p. 123). He concludes that the “God-given inherent dignity of all” must be acknowledged before excellence can be available to all students (p. 123). Purpel concludes that educators must be mindful of the teachings of Micah (6:5, *NIV*), always asking “What is good?” Only then will they gain the wisdom to do the right thing for all children, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic standing (Purpel, 2008, p. 116). Professor Asa Hilliard III once stated that “race, minority status, socioeconomic status, and other variables are not factors that predict what students can learn . . . they predict how schools will treat children (cited in Morris, 2002, p. 62). Public school teachers are entrusted with treating children from a wide variety of backgrounds fairly by providing all of the students with the best possible education, regardless of their backgrounds. The Bible states “how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation” (Acts 10:34-35). Teachers must especially take this message to heart. Though their religious and cultural views may be different from those of many of their students, a true Christian vision will enable teachers to truly accept the differences and celebrate the uniqueness of all of their children.

Gaps in research. While a plethora of research has been conducted on the underrepresentation of minority and low-income students in gifted classes, the research on their participation in high school Honors/AP classes is quite limited. Since students do not have to be identified as gifted to enroll in these rigorous high school classes, more research must be done to hear the students’ voices and to determine what factors have led

these students to their chosen academic paths. The *AP Potential* publication provides a firm foundation on which to begin a study, and the students themselves will then build the study with their experiences and their words. This study is needed in the static world of Honors and Advanced Placement classes.

Summary

The results of this research study are vital for the high school used in this research study, a school that is currently not serving all of their students to their greatest potential. The community is changing, becoming increasingly more diverse with each passing year (Jacoby, 2011). While there has been an “evolving shift in perspective” on gifted education in the last three decades, more must be done to eliminate the “elitism and racism that have plagued the field” (Matthews, Foster, Gladstone, Schieck, & Meiners, 2007, p. 316). This is especially true in the high schools where Honors and AP classes continue to be filled with White, upper middle class students while the halls of the schools are filled with many low-income and ethnically diverse students.

Current research shows that AP classes are the best predictors for success in college (College Board, 2011c; McCauley, 2007; Preston, 2009; Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). Success in college, in turn, leads to a greater chance for a more successful future (College Board, 2011c; Wakelyn & National Governors Association). Using PSAT scores, the College Board provides all schools with a list of students who show potential to be successful in Honors and AP classes (College Board, 2011a). However, while research proves that AP classes are predictors for college success, and, in turn, for hope of a more successful future, little research has been done to understand why many students who show potential to excel in

advanced classes are the ones who are denying themselves the chance to participate in these classes.

More research must be done to tear down the barriers that are keeping students from taking advantage of more rigorous classes. There is no doubt that students from all ethnicities and socioeconomic levels can be successful in advanced programs; they just need to be included. Armed with the knowledge gained and with the mandate to serve all children without leaving any behind, “the time to open doors to gifted education and AP classes is long overdue” (Ford & Whiting, 2008, p. 301). If this is done, then elitism will be abolished and equity in Honors and AP classes will be established.

CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The nature of this study was to examine the phenomenon of underrepresented students in one high school's Honors/AP program. The purpose of this study was to use the students' voices to determine why the students in this one particular culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged Georgia high school are choosing not to enroll in advanced classes. Therefore, a phenomenological design was incorporated. Students were selected through a purposeful criterion sampling to include only those students who had been predicted to be successful in Honors/AP classes by the *AP Potential* publication but who had elected not to enroll in these classes. Through the use of an initial interest survey, individual interviews, and focus groups, the students voiced their reasons, and I used coding and structural and textural descriptions "to develop the essence of the experience" at this school (Creswell, 2007, p. 236). Data collection and data analysis were triangulated to ensure the trustworthiness of the study so that the research is shown to be valid and can be replicated in further studies.

By using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I heard the students' voices and achieved a greater insight into the students' perspectives. The research questions focused on why students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes were choosing not to take these classes. The research questions also attempted to discover if the underrepresentation of students in Honors and AP classes may be caused by a lack of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty or if the cause of underrepresentation stems

from a cultural bias against the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves. Finally, the research attempted to determine if past educational experiences of these potential students have caused them to avoid Honors/AP classes.

This chapter will present an overview of the research design. A background of the school and of the students involved will be given as well as an overview of the projected data collection and data analysis methods.

Research Design

While a plethora of research has been conducted on the underrepresentation of minority and low-income students in gifted classes (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Gallagher, 2005; McBee, 2006; Miller, 2009; Staiger, 2004; Tomlinson, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007; Yoon & Gentry, 2009), the research on students' participation in high school Honors and AP classes is quite limited. Since students do not have to be identified as gifted to enroll in these rigorous high school classes, more research must be done to determine what factors have led these students to their chosen academic paths. The *AP Potential* report is a research-driven tool published by the College Board that helps to identify students who, based on their PSAT scores, are likely to succeed in Advanced Placement courses. Its goal is to help ensure that no student who has the potential to succeed in AP classes is overlooked.

The *AP Potential* report (College Board, 2011a) provided a firm foundation on which to begin a study, but the students themselves then built the study with their experiences and their words. Because participation in Honors and AP classes is by student choice, many students who appear on the *AP Potential* list choose not take

Honors and AP courses, especially minority and low-income students. This phenomenon is prevalent at the school where this research was conducted.

Therefore, the design of this study was a transcendental phenomenology. It followed the procedural steps outlined by Moustakas in 1994 (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Because I hoped to find the causes of the underrepresentation in Honors and AP classes at one school, I chose a phenomenology so that direct, primary documentation could be obtained from the students undergoing the phenomenon. In my research, I described the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). By using this approach, I was able to hear the voices of the participants, and through hearing their voices, I was able to record and document the students' views as to why this phenomenon is happening at the school, possibly affecting changes for the future.

Research Questions

The research focused on four central questions. Question 1 sought to answer the main purpose of the study – why students are choosing not to participate in Honors/AP classes. Questions 2, 3, and 4 broke down the research findings from other studies to determine if these same finding had a similar impact on the phenomenon at this school. Question 2 looked at the role of the faculty of the school as the root of the underrepresentation. Question 3 looked at the students' own cultural bias as the cause of the phenomenon. Question 4 looked at the students' past educational experiences as the possible cause of their decisions not to take these classes.

Research Question 1: Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?

Research Question 2: How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?

Research Question 3: How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes?

Research Question 4: How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes?

Participants

The participants were all students at a high school in northwest Georgia. A purposeful criterion sampling was used to select the participants. The criterion was that the participants had to be students who were listed in the *AP Potential* publication (College Board, 2011a) but who were not currently taking an Honors or AP class. The students also had to be ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. A mixture of sophomores, juniors, and seniors were included in the research study since the *AP Potential* list for the current 2011-2012 school year is based on the scores of the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who took the PSAT in the fall of 2010. Sixteen students chose to participate in the study.

Translator

Students selected for the study were all able to speak English; therefore, a translator was not needed in order to translate information sent to parents.

Setting/Site

The high school in this study is located in northwest Georgia. It is the oldest high school in the county, having opened to students for the 1956-57 school year. Originally

an agricultural area, the county has seen tremendous growth in industry and in population in the past two decades. Though the greatest population growth in the county has been in the southern sections that serve as bedroom communities for Atlanta, the population of the city that this school serves has also surged from 7,709 people in 2000 to 22,958 in 2010. This is an increase of 198% in the past ten years, making the city the fastest growing city in the county (Jacoby, 2011). Much of the town's growth has come from the many minority families who have moved here in order to work in the poultry and manufacturing plants located within the city. The town is also the site of three federally-funded low-income housing developments. The justice center, the court system, the educational system, and the hospital all are located within the school's attendance boundary, adding a very affluent sector to the city. The high school also serves the very rural northwestern section of the county, a community where many students still live on farms that have been in their families for generations. This high school has the advantage of having the most ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student population in the county.

At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, the high school in this research study had an enrollment of 1997 students (Cherokee High School, 2011). This population was used to draw participants for the research study. (It must be noted that the AP test information is based on the 2010-2011 school year since testing for the current school year has not yet occurred. Therefore, percentages for test takers were based on the population for the 2010-2011 school year instead of the current school year, but the research study information was based on the population of the current 2011-2012 school year, thus explaining why two sets of population numbers were used.)

Table 1

Ethnicity of Students in High School Being Studied in 2011-12 School Year

Ethnicity	Percentage of School Population
White	1489 (74.5%)
Hispanic	255 (12.8%)
Black	179 (9%)
Multiracial	69 (3.5%)
Asian	31 (1.5%)
American Indian	4 (<1%)
Other	3 (<1%)

The school also has a growing number of low-income students. Within this high school's zone, four of the five "feeder" elementary schools and one of the two middle schools are Title One schools. This high school does not participate in the Title One program, but approximately 40% of its students receive free and reduced lunch, and many others would qualify. However, many seniors participate in a work-exit program, allowing them to leave school early to carry a full-time job, thus alleviating their need for school lunch and further indicating the economic difficulties facing these students and their families. The administration at this school stated that the free and reduced lunch population is actually closer to 50% of the student population (Murdock, personal communication, January 2012).

Academically, the high school is very strong. It offers 18 of the 30 possible Advanced Placement courses for its students. Data from the 2010-11 year, as published in the *School Integrated Summary 2010-11* (College Board, 2011d, p. 20), show, however, that the results of the AP testing do not truly reflect the population of the high school. During the 2010-11 school year, the school's population was 71.8% White, with the remaining 28.2% divided among varying minorities, with the largest minorities being Hispanic at 11.6%, Black at 8.8%, Multi-racial at 6.6%, and Asian at 1% (Cherokee High School, 2010). However, AP statistics show that of the total of 162 students who took AP tests during the 2010-11 year, 128 were White. Therefore, White students took 79% of the tests. Also, 7 Asian students (4.3%), 4 Black students (2.5%), 14 Hispanic students (8.6%), and 3 who marked "Other" and 6 who did not mark a response for ethnicity took the test (College Board, 2011d).

Figure 1 clearly indicates that while White and Asian students are taking tests at a higher rate than average population, the Hispanic and Black students are being underrepresented on the tests. It should be noted that the multi-racial information may be skewed since the students who marked "Other" on the test were included in the multi-racial information. It should also be noted that six students taking an AP test chose not to mark any ethnicity on their test information. When looking at the total school population, only 8% (162 of 2029) of the students at this high school took an AP test during the 2010-2011 school year. Broken down into categories, 8.8% (128 of 1457) of the total White population of the school took an AP test. Also underrepresented were Black students with only 2.2% (4 of 178) of the population taking an AP test and Hispanic

students with 5.9% (14 of 236). In a reverse of this situation, 35% (7 of 20) Asian students took at least one AP test in 2011 (College Board, 2011d).

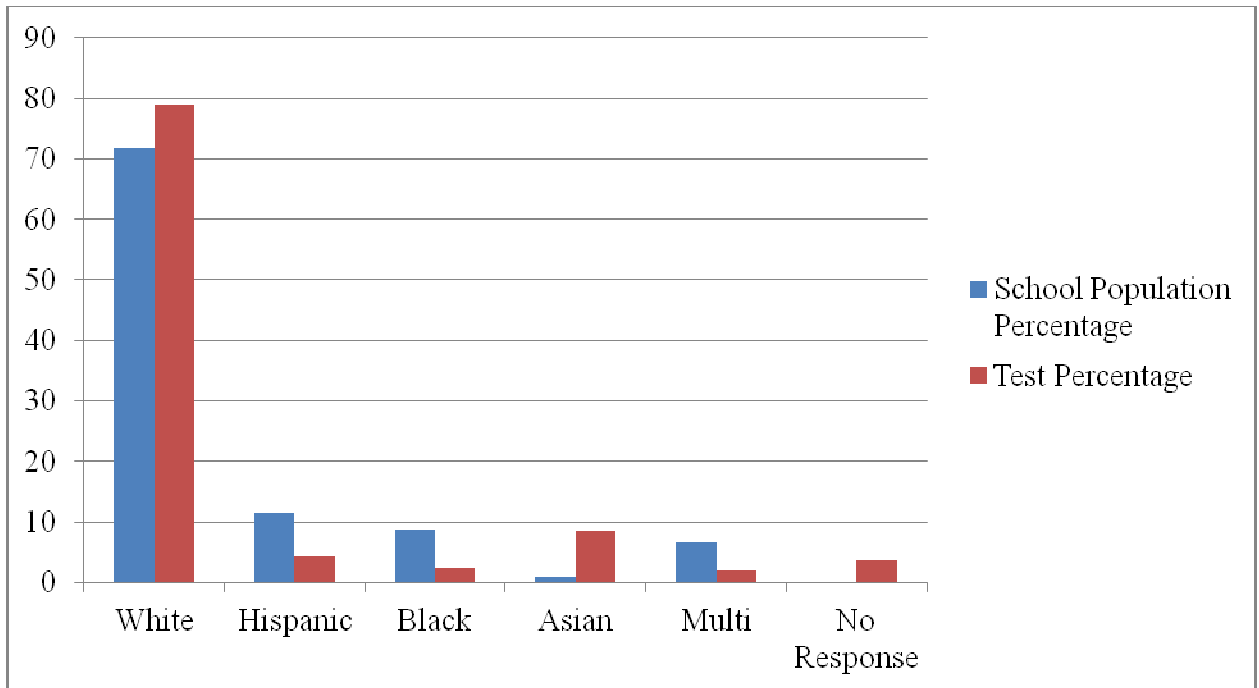


Figure 1: Comparison of school population to test population for 2010-11 school year

Socioeconomic levels are not reported on the AP test; however, there are records kept for those students who receive a fee waiver on the test due to their qualifying for free or reduced lunch. For the 2010-2011 school year, only 8% of the students taking an AP test at the school qualified for the fee waiver (College Board, 2011d), a significant difference from the 40% of the total population who do qualify for free and reduced lunch. This clearly indicates an underrepresentation of AP students from lower socioeconomic levels.

Researcher's Role / Personal Biography

I teach AP Literature and Honors Advanced Composition to seniors at the high school where the research will take place, and I also serve as the AP/Honors/Gifted Department Head. I have taught for 32 years in this same county, and I attended the high

school being used in the research study. Therefore, I have a vested interest since this is the community not only where I live and work, but also where I was also born and raised.

I have seen the county become more diverse, but not all schools and communities are equally diverse. Since I teach in the most culturally diverse school in the county, I have a personal stake in the development of classes that will allow all students to succeed to the best of their abilities. I have taught many students who would have thrived in Honors/AP classes, but as a teacher of seniors, it is too late for me to have any impact on their course decisions. I want to know why so many students choose not to take these courses and what, in the views of these students, the school can do in the future to ensure that more students are given the opportunity to excel in Honors/AP classes.

I am also a Christian who believes in living the teachings of the Bible that tell us to love those who are foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:19), to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31), to treat others as you want to be treated (Luke 6:31), and to save the children of the needy (Psalms 72:4).

Since I have a personal interest in the outcome of the research, I must work to bracket my personal experiences in order to remain separated from the text. In order to ensure that this disconnection is achieved, I will conduct a transcendental phenomenology, allowing me to simply describe the experience instead of interpreting it. I will ask questions, record exact answers, and publish the described phenomenon, thus eliminating any potential bias.

Data Collection

Since this research was conducted in a high school and included students under the age of 18, an Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was needed

(Appendix A). An Expedited Review was further needed since the research involved “individual or group characteristics or behavior” that were documented through surveys, interviews, and focus groups (Liberty University, 2011).

Again, since high school students were involved, the local School Board and the school also had to grant approval for the research to take place (Appendix B). Along with this, an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) with both student and parent signatures was obtained from each participant before he/she could participate in the study.

Initial interest survey. I created a general interest survey (Appendix D) to give out to at least 50 students whose names appeared on the *AP Potential* list but who were not currently taking an Honors/AP course. The purpose of the initial interest survey was to find students who were interested and willing to take part in the research. This information allowed me to find participants who fit into the sampling group needed for the proper criterion sampling. I also used the information on the survey to divide the students into two groups: those who had never taken an Honors/AP course and those who had taken an Honors course in the past but who had chosen not to continue. If the student did not continue because of poor grades in past Honors classes, he was considered for the study. Since the results of the interest survey were used only to find students who were willing to participate in the study and were not used for research data, it did not have to be validated as a tool for obtaining data for the research.

However, three different data collection methods were used in order to have triangulation of the data collected. Triangulation is when research is corroborated by more than one method of data collection. This is especially necessary in qualitative

research since observations alone may not be completely accurate (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 19). In this research, individual interviews, a focus group meeting, and a log were used to validate the data collection through triangulation.

Interviews. Once students had been chosen to participate in the research study, consent forms (Appendix C) were distributed. Since many students ride buses to school, the interviews had to be conducted within the school day. Students who chose to participate were contacted to set up interviews before school, after school, or during their lunch periods. A set list of open-ended questions were used for each interview (Appendix E), but the participants were given a chance at the end of the interview to add any comments they would like to add. With the participants' consent, the interviews were be audiotaped for accuracy. The interviews were transcribed exactly as they were recorded, and relevant excerpts are included in Appendix H. Interviews followed an outlined set of procedures (Appendix F). This method of data collection followed the guidelines set up by Polkinghorne in 1989, Van Manen in 1990, and Moustakas in 1994 (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

The purpose of the interview was to gain insight that will be significant for all of the research questions. All ten interview questions (Appendix E) were used to come to a consensus of the phenomenon in order to answer Research Question 1: Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes? Interview questions four and seven (Appendix E) were used to determine what, if any, impact the faculty has had on the students' decisions not to participant in Honors/AP classes. The information gathered was used to answer Research Question 2: How does the level of encouragement on the

part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?

Interview questions five, six, eight, nine, and ten (Appendix E) delved into the students' perceptions of Honors/AP courses based on the influence and reactions of their family and friends. The data gained was used to answer Research Question 3: How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes? Finally, interview questions one, two, four, seven, and eight (Appendix E) investigated how any past educational experiences of the students may have impacted their decisions not to participate in Honors/AP courses. This data was used to answer Research Question 4: How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes?

Focus group. All students were asked to come back together for a focus group interview. New questions based on data gathered from the original interviews were addressed (Appendix G). Students also had a chance to discuss any thoughts they may had about the process. New information and insights arose from the students' interactions; the discussion sparked new memories and encouraged them to share information that they were hesitant to share in individual interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 133). Again, the discussion was audiotaped for accuracy and transcribed (Appendix G). The information obtained was used to reflect on the answers to all research questions in this study.

Log. I kept a log throughout the process, noting not only facts but also observations that appeared during the process. Logging the data, as noted by Lofland and Lofland (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 138), allowed me not only to separate the facts

from my opinions, but may lead me to new insights as I wrote up the interview scripts from the recording. Again, all information was used to support all research questions in this study.

Data Analysis

By analyzing the data through a variety of methods, called data analysis triangulation, clearer results are formed and the final results can be validated (Creswell, 79). In this research, data analysis triangulation occurred through the use of horizontalization, open coding, two-tiered coding, clusters of meanings, a composite description, member checks, an audit trail, and memoing.

Horizontalization and open coding. Once the data collection was completed, I first used Strauss and Corbin's open coding process (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 240). After I transcribed the audiotapes of the interviews, I found significant statements that represented common themes. I highlighted each theme in a different color, thereby determining the first set of general themes found in the interviews. This step, known as horizontalization was vital because it gave me a starting point for finding the answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

Then open coding, which is putting the themes together in sections to develop the major themes of the research (Creswell, 2007, p. 239), was used to answer the four research questions. Themes regarding teachers' and counselors' impact on students' decisions not to take Honors or AP courses was used to answer Research Question 2: How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes? Themes revolving around the students' own recognized and unrecognized biases toward Honors and AP classes that

have been caused by friends and family were used to answer Research Question 3: How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes? Themes of past educational experiences that may have had a negative impact on the students' perceptions of rigorous academic classes were used to answer Research Question 4: How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes? Once that several general themes were noted, I will then be able to more fully understand the phenomenon and to answer Research Question 1: Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?

Two-tiered coding. My second step was to take the themes found in the open coding process and further extrapolate them to find more specificity within those themes (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p.634). This led to a closer analysis of the information and provided me an opportunity to ensure that no themes had been undiscovered. This was a vital step in order to add credibility to the findings and to find specific answers to the research questions.

Clusters of Meanings. This step in phenomenological data analysis allowed me to cluster the themes into "meaning units" and to remove any overlapping or repetitive statements (Creswell, 2007, p. 235).

Composite Description. I completed a textural description of what the participants experienced, including verbatim examples from the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). I then completed a structural description to show how the phenomenon happened, including information about the setting and the context of the experience (Creswell, 2007,

p. 159). Finally, I wrote a composite description, combining both the textural and structural description. The final description resulted in the formation of the essence of the participants' experiences, which then allowed me to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. In Polkinghorne's words, the composite description allowed me to "understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" phenomenon (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 62). This also added credibility to the study.

Member Checks. After the individual interviews were transcribed and coded, the participants were shown a copy of the transcript of their interviews. They were asked to verify the accuracy of the statements and to correct errors if they found any. The findings were discussed, and the students were asked for their input. This process, known as member checks (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 475) increased the reliability of the study since the participants validated the findings of the study.

Audit trail. I kept a running log of every step I took in the process, including dates and specific details. This provided not only proof of the research, but it will also allow the research to be replicated in the future. This audit log gave the study credibility, which is accurate interpretation through internal validation (Creswell, 2007, p. 204), dependability, which is reliability achieved through the auditing process (p. 206), and transferability, which will allow other researchers to transfer their findings to another study (p. 204).

Memoing. I created a chart, placing the facts I discovered in one column and my thoughts about those findings in a second column. This provided a method for me to view my thought process, to describe personal experiences through epoche, and to reduce

any bias. It will also allow others to see why I developed the themes and how I arrived at the essence of the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 67).

Data triangulation. This research study began with the use of data collected from the *AP Potential* publication. From this data, possible participants were selected. Then through the use of individual interviews, a focus group meeting, and a log, triangulation of collection was achieved. This use of various methods to corroborate the findings added validity to the research findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 657).

Data analysis triangulation. Data analysis triangulation was achieved using a variety of methods. First, horizontalization, open coding, two-tiered coding, and meaning clusters were used to analyze the gathered data. Memoing ensured credibility of the study, and an audit trail provided the dependability needed for replication. The use of a variety of analysis methods validated the findings of the research (Creswell, 2007, p. 79).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is vital so that others who read the findings can see how the meanings were discovered (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). Trustworthiness in this research was achieved through the transcription of the exact words of the participants' interview, the memoing and audit trail of the process, and the triangulation of both the data collection and the data analysis.

Credibility. Credibility ensures that the results are an accurate interpretation of what the students meant (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). The findings in this study were recorded exactly as they occurred, describing the reality of the research process. The findings were analyzed using the series of recommended steps that were stated in the data

analysis section. These steps followed the guidelines of qualitative researchers in the field so that the findings were given credibility.

Dependability. Dependability is achieved through the “auditing of the research process” (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). To ensure dependability, all information was gathered and recorded consistently, providing rich details of the research process.

Transferability. The research process and the information garnered in the study were documented in detail so that the research process can be replicated exactly in another setting to further examine the findings (Creswell, 2007, p. 204). This will allow the findings to be used in other research studies, thus providing transferability.

Ethical Issues

In order to ensure the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were used for the for all participants, and the school was not named. All participants were given a statement ensuring them that the information given by specific individuals will never be discussed with others, especially teachers, counselors, administrators, or parents (Appendix C). Since their parents may also fear the invasion of privacy, a consent form was sent home for all parents to sign, ensuring anonymity for the students and for their families (Appendix C).

Some of the information obtained did not shine well on the school and on specific faculty members from that school. I ensured that the information obtained was used only for suggested improvements, not for repercussions for past problems.

My personal ethics ensured that the truth was always given, even if the truth was not what I wanted to hear. Since I am also a teacher at the school where the study took place, I had to bracket my personal feelings since some information I gained did not

speak highly of some aspects of the school. The purpose of the study was to report what the students had experienced and what they felt about those experiences. Therefore, I had to present all findings clearly and honestly, removing all personal bias from the presentation of those findings. Only through this process of the true reporting of the students' viewpoints could the phenomenological study be a valid reflection of the students who had lived that phenomenon.

My ethical considerations were and still are based on my Christian belief that all people should be treated with respect and fairness. All students, whether they are culturally diverse or come from a low socioeconomic background, deserve an education that will allow them to reach their fullest potential. A quality education, which was the goal of this research, will allow these students to show their "aptitude for every kind of learning" and to be "well-informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve" for higher purposes (Daniel 1:4). If only given a chance, these students can "fulfill the plans God has for their lives," and their success in school can give "them hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the causes for high school students' decisions not to enroll in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses in one Georgia high school. Since the study deals with choices made by high school students, hearing their voices was vital; therefore, a phenomenological study was used in order to capture the essence of the research as seen through the eyes of those whom the study impacts most – the students. A phenomenology is necessary so that the students' voices can be heard and can provide a missing but vital link in the research.

Research Questions

The study was designed to determine why students who have the potential to be successful in Honors and AP courses, as noted by their placement on College Board's *AP Potential* list, are choosing not to participate in those classes. Four specific research questions were used to guide the study.

1. Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?
2. How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?
3. How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes?
4. How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes?

Participants

The participants in this study were all students at the same northwest Georgia high school. All of the students were listed on the *AP Potential* list provided to the school by the College Board. This list provides the names of students who, based on their PSAT scores, are predicted to have at least a 70% chance of being successful in one or more Advanced Placement courses. A purposeful criterion sampling was used to identify the participants for this study. The *AP Potential* list provided a base list of students with potential. First, all students who were currently enrolled in at least one Honors or AP class were removed from the sampling. Students who had withdrawn from the school since the list was created were also removed. This left a basic list of 469 students. From this list, fifty students of different genders and ethnicities were chosen to receive the invitation and initial interest survey (Appendix D). I sent out a second round of ten invitations and initial interest surveys and also followed up with personal contact with several of the students. From those invitations, thirty surveys were returned to me. While six of the students responded that they did not want to participate, twenty-four indicated their agreement to participate.

A parent consent/student assent form was then sent to those twenty-four participants. Of those, seventeen returned the consent forms, but only sixteen students participated in the individual interviews; one student forgot his appointment on three different occasions and was, therefore, not included in the study.

The sixteen participants included ten females and six males. Ethnically, the participants included one multi-racial, six Hispanic, five White, and four African American students. The students ranged in age from 15 to 18, with eight seniors, five

juniors, and three sophomores participating in the interviews. Of the sixteen students, ten of them qualified for the free and/or reduced lunch program at the school. Student profiles are included; however, all students were given pseudonyms for privacy.

Participant profiles. Participant One, Clara, is a seventeen-year-old Hispanic female. She is a senior and had never taken an Honors or AP course. She had predicted AP potential in one subject area.

Participant Two, Kaitlyn, is a sixteen-year-old Hispanic female. She is a junior and had never taken an Honors or AP course. She had predicted AP potential in one subject area.

Participant Three, Garrett, is a seventeen-year-old White male. Though he lists himself as a senior, he is not sure of his current grade level because he was home schooled during part of his junior year, and he may not be able to graduate at the end of this school year. He did take some Honors courses in the past, but he had never taken an AP course. He had predicted AP potential in twenty-five subject areas – all areas included on the AP Potential list.

Participant Four, Sally, is a fifteen-year-old White female. She is sophomore, and she had never taken an Honors or AP course. She had predicted AP potential in three subject areas.

Participant Five, Paris, is a seventeen-year-old multi-racial female. She is a junior and had never taken an Honors or AP course. She had predicted AP potential in one subject area.

Participant Six, Emory, is an eighteen-year-old African American female. She is a senior, and she had taken five Honors courses in the past. She had predicted AP

potential in ten subject areas.

Participant Seven, Shane, is a sixteen-year-old African American male. He is a junior, and he took two Honors class in his freshman year. He had predicted AP potential in seven subject areas.

Participant Eight, Anthony, is a fifteen-year-old White male. He is a sophomore, and he had never taken an Honors or AP class. He had predicted AP potential in twenty-one subject areas.

Participant Nine, Karina, is a sixteen-year-old Hispanic female. She is a senior, and she had never taken an Honors or AP class. She had predicted potential in one subject area.

Participant Ten, Michaela, is a fifteen-year-old Hispanic female. She is a sophomore and had never taken an Honors or AP class. She had predicted AP potential in one subject area.

Participant Eleven, Charles, is sixteen-year-old Hispanic male. He is a junior and had never taken an Honors or AP class. He had predicted AP potential in two subject areas.

Participant Twelve, Bree, is a seventeen-year-old African American female. She is a senior and had never taken an Honors or AP class. She had predicted AP potential in two subject areas.

Participant Thirteen, James, is an eighteen-year-old African American male. He is a senior and had never taken an Honors or AP class. He had predicted AP potential in one area.

Participant Fourteen, Mary, is a sixteen-year-old Hispanic female. She is a junior and had never taken an Honors or AP class. She had predicted AP potential in one area.

Participant Fifteen, Jonathan, is a seventeen-year-old White male. He is a senior, and he took one Honors class in the past. He had predicted AP potential in twenty-two subject areas.

Participant Sixteen, Bethany, is a seventeen-year-old White female. She is a senior and had never taken an Honors or AP class. She had predicted AP potential in fourteen subject areas.

Table 2

Participant Information

Student	Gender	Grade	Ethnicity	Number of AP Potential Classes
1	Female	12	Hispanic	1
2	Female	11	Hispanic	1
3	Male	12	White	25
4	Female	10	White	3
5	Female	11	Multiracial	1
6	Female	12	African American	10
7	Male	11	African American	7
8	Male	10	White	21
9	Female	12	Hispanic	1
10	Female	10	Hispanic	1
11	Male	11	Hispanic	2
12	Female	12	African American	2
13	Male	12	African American	1
14	Female	11	Hispanic	1
15	Male	12	White	22
16	Female	12	White	14

Interviews

Students participated in individual interviews either before or after school or during their lunch periods. The interviews lasted from ten minutes to twenty-five minutes, based on the responses of the students. Interviews were based on a set of basic questions (Appendix C), but students were allowed to discuss other concerns they had. This allowed the phenomenon to be seen through the eyes of the students and, in turn, led me to a deeper understanding of the high school experiences of these students. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed exactly as they were recorded. Excerpts are included in Appendix H.

Once all sixteen interviews were transcribed, students were given a copy of their interviews and asked to verify the information as it was written to ensure that the interviews had been transcribed correctly. This member check insured the validity of the information gathered. The data was then analyzed using horizontalization and open coding. Each theme was highlighted with a different color, thus showing the basic themes found in the individual interviews as they related to the research questions.

While Question One was answered based on the results of all data obtained, students' own perceptions of why they have chosen not to take these courses were highlighted. This also included what the students currently knew about AP and Honors classes. These responses were combined with other information obtained throughout the research to answer Question One. Themes regarding students' discussions with adults about Honors and AP courses were highlighted separately for teachers and for counselors and were analyzed to answer Question Two. Themes regarding cultural bias on the part of the students, their peers, and their families were highlighted and used to answer

Question Three. Themes regarding students' past educational experiences were highlighted and used to answer Question Four. Separate areas that were highlighted included the students' opinions of what choices they would have made for their high school classes if they had been told of their inclusion on the *AP Potential* list as well as their ideas of how the school can involve more students in the Honors and AP classes. I also kept a log throughout the interview and coding process in order to separate my opinions from the facts, allowing new insights into the phenomenon. This also allowed for an audit trail to add credibility, dependability and transferability. Memoing was used to further reduce any chance of researcher bias.

A focus group meeting was then held. All sixteen participants were contacted individually and were given written invitations to participate in the focus group meeting. However, on the day of the meeting, only five of the participants came to the focus group meeting. Of these students, two were White, one was Hispanic, one was African American, and one was multi-racial; therefore, the group still accurately represented the ethnic makeup of the school and the original participants. The focus group questions (Appendix G) were asked, and the students also led the discussion into their own areas of concern. The meeting was audiotaped for accuracy, and the student responses were transcribed exactly. Excerpts are included in Appendix I.

The same highlighting process was completed to further extrapolate information from the major themes already discovered. The information gathered in the focus group was added to the previous information gathered. This information was then used to answer the four research questions.

Interview Results

The results of the interview were used to form a composite description of the phenomenon. A textural description of what the participants experienced, including verbatim examples from the study, was first completed. A structural description was then completed to show how the phenomenon happened, including information about the setting and the context of the experience. Finally, a composite description was completed, combining both the textural and structural description and showing the essence of the study.

Textural description. Students chosen for the research study were first interviewed individually. The purpose of the interview was to discover the students' viewpoints and to determine why they were not participating in Honors or AP classes. From these interviews, several themes emerged.

The first theme that emerged was the lack of information that students have about Honors and AP courses. Of these sixteen participants, four students had taken Honors courses earlier in their high school career, but they had chosen either to drop the course during that school year or had chosen not to enroll in an Honors course for the next school year. None of the students interviewed had ever taken an AP course. Besides the four students with limited Honors experience, the only information the students knew about Honors and AP courses came from their peers.

When asked what they knew about Honors and AP courses, eight of the students used the word "hard" to describe the classes, and "challenging" was mentioned in six of the responses. Four students said that only "smart people" take the courses, and Garrett stated that the Honors and AP classes are for those "people who do well in school –

people who are capable of doing it.” Bree said that she had heard that the classes were so hard that the majority of the students in them wanted to drop the classes.

While there was some misinformation, some of the students did know some information about AP classes. One student focused on the challenging aspects of the classes, and five of the students stated that taking Honors or AP classes may have some impact on a student’s college career. Clara said that they were “helpful for a college application,” and Sally and Paris said that colleges look at the courses more on their transcripts, a statement echoed by Charles. Sally also knew that an AP course might give a student college credit, and Michaela said that when AP students go to college, they do not have to “retake those courses” they get credit for in high school. Although this information is correct, very little information about Honors and AP classes was known by the students. Misinformation from their peers seemed to override the facts they knew.

The second theme that emerged concerned the students’ own personal fears about the classes. Based on the information, or misinformation, they had heard from their peers, the students had definite personal concerns as to why they were not taking Honors or AP courses.

Fear of failure was prevalent in the minds of several students. Because she had heard that the classes are hard, Karina was afraid that the class “might be hard to pass” and then she would not “graduate on time.” Bree said that she “wants to take a class that [she knows] for a fact [she] will pass.” She does not want to put herself in a “predicament” where she cannot “graduate on time.” Bree may have summed up this fear of not graduating on time for everyone when she said, “I am not sure . . . what my greatest potential is, but I don’t want to risk it.”

Stress was another common theme concerning Honors and AP classes. Several of the students mentioned that they did not want the stress that would come with taking harder classes. Emory, however, discussed at length the stress that students have outside of the classroom as well. She said that she wanted to take an Honors class, but she knew that she was going to have a job, and she “was going through things at home, so it was just going to be too much.” She knew that she could not give her “full focus” to an Honors class.

I really do want to take Honors classes, but at the same time I’m going to be having jobs, and I don’t want to not be able to give my full focus to an Honors class, so I was like I really can’t take Honors classes because I need money. And a lot of things were going on. So like, yeah, that was my focus for not putting myself in an Honors class because I knew A) I was going to be struggling in it and still pass the class or either B) I was just going to fail, and I don’t want to. I’m just like the kind of person where I want to pass the class and like to the best as I can, so . . . the outside factors mainly contributed a lot to me not taking Honors courses.

Eight of the participants said that they chose not to take Honors or AP courses because of their own work ethic. Garrett called himself an “underachiever.” He said that he is capable of doing the work, but he does not do it because he is lazy, a point echoed by Jonathan, Anthony, and Bethany. Sally said that she is “not good with responsibility” and that she knew that she would not “fulfill” what she “needs to do in the class.” Procrastination and laziness were also mentioned by several students. Paris admitted that she “never really pushed [herself because] it never really seemed like a priority.”

Therefore, part of the factor preventing students from participating in Honors or AP classes had nothing to do with the school setting.

The final theme that emerged in the area of grades is that the students were concerned about upsetting their status quo. Shane said that he “would rather have a good grade in a regular class than a bad grade in a good class.” Having to study constantly and to be prepared for the harder material was a concern for Michaela. Her friends in advanced classes have more work than she does; she has about one hour of work per night, and she is finished. She does not want the work load they have. Paris may have also hit upon an important universal point in the argument not to take Honors or Advanced classes. She stated that if she “can exceed in a CP (college prep) class and just be mediocre in an Honors or AP class, then why should [she] take an Honors or AP course if she [stands out] more in a CP” class.

Another area of the interviews focused on the role of the teachers and counselors at the school. While seven of the sixteen participants stated that a teacher had suggested that they take an Honors course, none of the students followed through on those recommendations. Fifteen of the students said that they see no bias, intentional or unintentional, on the part of teachers recommending students to take advanced courses. However, Kaitlyn, an Hispanic female, brought up the subject herself. When asked if she had any questions, this was her response.

I would like to ask why, how come so many kids get the opportunity to go into AP, and they don't ask them if they want to, and they don't ask other kids who have high A's in every class; they don't ask them if they want to. Like, I don't want to offend anybody. I see more White people there. Cause it doesn't mean

that just White people can be smart. There's some Hispanic, African American, Asians. It doesn't matter. There's a lot of smart people they don't realize.

Maybe they might think, "Well, he's from a different place. He might not know anything. . . I think that some teachers think just because we're not from here or where they grew up that we might not have the same levels as other people.

This student goes on to state that she makes very good grades in Spanish, but a teacher has never recommended her to take an Honors class. Sally, a White student, has also witnessed this discrimination. She said that she has seen many teachers who have two students, one White and one a minority, who are doing well, but the teacher goes to the White student to recommend him to be in AP, not the minority student. She said that this has impacted her view of Honors and AP classes. She does not "know if they are undermining them on purpose or on accident, but it makes [her] want to turn away and not do [AP] at all."

While seven of the sixteen students who were interviewed had been approached by a teacher about taking an Honors or AP course, this was not the case with the counselors. None of the students said that a counselor had ever mentioned taking an Honors or AP class to them. One student stated that her counselor did tell her that she had potential, but the counselor did not advise her to take an advanced course. The decision was left up to her.

A common theme seemed to be that the students found the counselors to be distant. Many of the students stated that they never talk to their counselors at all. However, those who have spoken to them expressed a disconnection with the counselors. Kaitlyn said that the counselors "don't have any role" in the school; "they are ... just

there.” Paris added that students just “don’t feel welcomed” in the counselors’ office. While both Sally and Bree said that the counselors treat the students like a “student ID” and not a person, Bree went on to add that the counselors act like they “see a hundred kids a day” so that “each person [is not] important” to them. She also feels that the counselors do not look at students individually. She said that they rely on what worked in the past, but she feels that they need to help the students individually because “not everybody learns in the same way.” Bree went on to state that the counselors are “in a field where [they] are going to be surrounded by people from different households who are experiencing different things,” so they need to take “each situation and treat them all special like they are special cases.”

Sally stated that the counselors do not really know the students. This point was echoed by Bree who said that all people in the school have a role to play, from the custodians to the teachers to the administrators, but the counselors are like “they are not here. . . They stay to themselves in their offices and when [the students] do go in there,” the counselors act like they “have never seen [the student] before.” The overall point the students made was that while the counselors give the students basics about transcripts and graduation, the students do not feel as if they are people whom they can go to for advice.

When asked if their families would support their decision to take an Honors or AP class, all of the students said they would definitely receive support. The words “proud,” “excited,” and “happy” were mentioned by several students. Shane said that his mother “would love it” if he took an AP course because she wants him “to succeed so much . . . and get into the best college” he can.

While all of the students said that their families would support their decision to take Honors and AP classes, several students did note that their parents would not pressure them to take the classes. These students stated that their parents would not want them to take classes that would put more stress or too much pressure on them. Other students said that their parents would tell them to think about the added work load but that their parents would still support them in either decision they made.

Parents' expectations of grade point average (GPA) did come up in the focus group meeting. Sally said that some parents get angry if a student gets "an 86 or an 89 on a paper," and they would not understand that the Honors and AP classes are harder. Bree agreed, stating that "some parents are all about perfection," and "they are going to be disappointed [because] they don't understand how much work you have on you unless they were actually in your shoes." The general consensus was that parents would be less hard on the students if they make good grades in regular classes, so this may be a cause of students deciding not to take Honors or AP classes.

Charles said that he sees taking an Honors or AP course as a way of bettering himself and showing how thankful he is to his parents who have supported him in school. Michaela also felt that her taking an Honors or AP course would be important to her family because no one in her family had ever taken an AP course before. Family support was definitely not a deterrent in students' decisions not to take the advanced classes.

When asked about community support, most students did not see the community as a factor in their school decisions. However, some discussion of different cultural backgrounds did come up. Two African American students felt that there are some societal barriers that students must overcome. Paris is multi-racial but closely identifies

with many of the African American students. She feels that African American students are “not pushed strong enough to broaden their knowledge” or to look at “what’s best for their future.” She said that many of her African American friends are very intelligent, but they do not show it in school. She said that African American peers can also be “demotivators” because they do not want to see other African American students succeed.

Shane said that while he has not received discouragement from the African American community, he did remember that he was the “only Black person” in the Honors classes he took as a freshman. He said that the African American community would rather see a child excel in other areas such as sports more than academics; therefore, many African American students “don’t try to do well” or “don’t care enough to do well.” He feels that more African American students would participate in Honors or AP classes if they receive encouragement from within the school because they do not receive it outside of school. While he did not mention the term “acting white” until it was brought up in the interview, he said that he has heard the term out in the community and he finds it “downgrading because [he is] just as African American as they are.”

Two Hispanic students briefly discussed the Hispanic community. Michaela felt that it is not discouragement from the Hispanic community that prevents Hispanic students from taking Honors and AP courses – it is, instead, a lack of encouragement. Since many of the community members, including their parents, have never taken an AP course, students may not see the need to take the more rigorous courses. However, Mary did add that if an Hispanic student did choose to take an AP course, he “would be looked up on in the Hispanic community,” not ostracized because of it.

Finally, the role of peers was discussed. The opinions of peers did not seem to bear any weight on students' decisions not to take Honors or AP courses. Ten of the sixteen students said that their friends would encourage them to take Honors courses. Karina did say that she would be called a "nerd" by her friends, but they would also think she is special for taking the harder class, and being special is more important than being a nerd.

Only two negative comments about peers were given. The first negative comment came from Kaitlyn, an Hispanic female. She said that her friends would think she is "kind of naïve" for taking an AP or Honors course. She said that they would give her a hard time because they would think she is trying to be smarter than them and that she is rubbing their faces in it. As an African American female, Bree said that she would not "get a good vibe" from her friends because their "mindset is negative" since they are not on track to graduate. She said that they would tell her that she thinks she is better than they are. However, because of her strong family support and her desire to succeed, she would not let their comments bother her or dissuade her from taking the courses.

Structural description. This phenomenological study took place in a North Georgia high school with a population of 1997 students. The school's population is comprised of 1489 (74.5%) Caucasian students, 255 (12.8%) Hispanic students, 179 (9%) African American students, 31 (1.5%) Asian students, 4 American Indian students, and 69 (3.5%) students who list their ethnicity as multiracial or other. The current teacher population of 123 teachers consists of 117 (95%) Caucasian teachers, 4 (3%) Hispanic teachers, and 2 (1.6%) African American teachers. Approximately 40% of the student population receive free or reduced lunches, a number that is not truly indicative of the

actual number of students who could qualify for the lunch program since many of the students participate in the school's work-study program and leave school before lunch to go to a job. Therefore, these students do not fill out the free or reduced lunch form. Ten of the sixteen students in this research qualified for free or reduced lunch.

While the school is diverse, this diverse population is not reflected in the Honors and AP program where the population of those classes remains filled with predominately White, middle to upper class students. Therefore, while the school's population, along with the surrounding city's population, continues to become more diverse each year, the Honors and AP population is not changing to reflect the current school and city population.

A second concern about the students' participation in the Honors and AP courses centers around the *AP Potential* list, a list generated by The College Board. This list indicates all students who, based on their PSAT scores, have the potential to be successful in AP courses. Of the 1267 freshmen, sophomores, and juniors given the PSAT in the fall of 2010, 957 showed potential in at least one subject area, and many showed potential in several areas, with some indicating potential in all twenty-five areas listed. Of those students, 488 are enrolled in an Honors or AP class for the 2011-12 school year, leaving 469 (49%) students out of classes where they are academically capable of excelling. Thus, the need to determine why these students are not being served became the focus of this study.

A list was generated of those students who showed potential but who were not participating in any Honors or AP classes. Based on a cross-section of ethnicities and genders, a purposeful criterion sampling was used to select fifty students to receive the

initial interest survey (Appendix D). The students who returned the initial interest survey and indicated that they would agree to participate in the study were then sent student assent/parent consent forms (Appendix C). Individual interviews were then set up at a time convenient for the students, and the sixteen students who kept their interview appointments were interviewed. Students were asked to verify the transcripts of their interviews (Appendix H). A follow up focus group meeting was held, and the findings were transcribed (Appendix I), logged and analyzed to determine factors leading to the phenomenon of underrepresentation in AP and Honors classes at the school.

Composite description. In essence, this study discovered that while the personal experiences of the individual students were quite varied, they all shared common factors that played a vital role in their decisions not to participate in Honors and AP courses.

The most significant common theme was their lack of information about Honors and AP classes. While several of the students said that they had heard that Honors and AP classes were “hard,” their information did not come from any adult at the school who is knowledgeable about the courses. All of their information came from peers who had either dropped an Honors course in the past because it was too “hard” for them or who were basing their knowledge of the classes on hearsay themselves. The students interpreted the word “hard” to mean “more work,” and since many of the students interviewed already have stress from school work or work outside of school, they decided that the Honors and AP classes were not for them. Emory stated, “I need money,” summarizing the point that physical needs take precedence over academic concerns for many of the students.

The second piece of information that the students knew about Honors and AP classes is that the classes are for “smart people.” They felt as if they were not smart enough to take the classes with the “smart kids.” Since none of the students had been told that their name was on the *AP Potential* list, they were surprised, and many quite excited, to learn that their names appear on a list as one of the “smart people.” Fourteen of the sixteen students interviewed said that if they had been told that their name was on the list, they would have taken an Honors or AP class. The simple fact that their names were on the list even overrode some students’ fear of failure.

I believe it would [change my mind about taking advanced classes] because I am all about success. If somebody was to bring it to my attention, I would consider it strongly. Because it was never really offered to me, I never really took the initiative to find out more about it. . . I would matter because it’s like, well, somebody else sees potential in myself. Out of a lot of kids, I was . . . the needle in the haystack. And it would make me feel really good to be acknowledged.

(Bree)

The knowledge of their names on the *AP Potential* list seemed to give the students confidence that they had the ability to take an advanced class and be successful. Therefore, a simple lack of communication with the students may have caused many students to miss out on the education that could be provided to them in advanced educational classes.

To better understand the school’s role in the lack of communication with the students, the roles of the teachers and counselors were discussed. While the ethnic makeup of the teachers is not as diverse as that of the student body of the school, most of

the students did not indicate any bias on the part of their teachers, either intentional or unintentional. Several of the students said that at least one teacher had mentioned Honors classes to them, but the students made the decision not to take the advanced course. Some based this decision on their own lack of work ethic, but others based their decision on the misinformation mentioned earlier. They were afraid that they were not smart enough to take the course or that the work would be too hard and they would not pass the class and would not graduate on time. However, one Hispanic student, Kaitlyn, did feel that there is a phenomenon of White teachers overlooking students' abilities if the students are of a minority ethnicity. This sentiment was echoed by Sally in the focus group interview. In the end, however, according to the students interviewed, teachers actually played little if any role in the students' decisions not to take an Honors or AP course.

On the other hand, the students were quite vocal in their opinions about the role of the counselors in their academic decisions. The students felt that the role of the counselor is to advise students, and none of the students felt that they were adequately advised about course options by their counselors. There was a general consensus of a disconnect between the counselors and the students. The overall feeling was that the counselors are just at school to make sure that the students have the courses they need to graduate, but they do not advise students about which courses to take or talk to them about the options of courses on different levels. They said that they rarely even speak to a counselor, and when they do get in to see one, they feel as if they are treated as a student ID number because the counselor sees so many people that she does not get to know any of them personally. All students in the research study said that the counselors do not play any

role in their selection of classes and that the counselors had never told them that they had the potential to do well in an Honors or AP class.

Since the school plays only one part in the students' decision about course selection, the role of the family was also explored. Family support did not seem to play any role at all in the students' decisions not to take Honors or AP courses. Many of the families only know what their children tell them about Honors and AP courses; they do not know a great deal about the purpose and advantages of the courses. However, the students said that their parents did know enough that they would be proud of them for being in the classes because it would mean that they are smart. The students also felt that their parents would not pressure them to take the class, even if the student had been recommended, because they would not want them to have more work than they can handle – again, an idea that may be based on their own child's perception or misinformation from their peers.

Community support also did not seem to be a deterrent in any community except the African American community. There was a general feeling among the African American students interviewed that the African American community in this school district does not stress academics as being as important in their children's lives as other areas of interest. There is not as much encouragement to be successful in school, and one student noted that many African American students can be put down by their community as trying to "act white" because they are successful in school. Shane noted a separation in the African American community between "those who are actually trying to make something out of themselves" and those who are "negative." Paris agreed, stating that "it's a big issue in the African American community. Like if you see one African

American succeed, they are always being put down by their own. . . [ostracizing is] not taboo at all.”

None of the Caucasian students felt that their community would discourage them if they took Honors or AP courses, and one Hispanic student said students who take advanced courses “would be looked up on in the Hispanic community.” However, a strong point was made that while students are not discouraged from taking Honors/AP courses, they also were not encouraged because their parents themselves have never taken advanced courses so they do not know to encourage their children to do so. This lack of encouragement may be a greater deterrent for students than discouragement. Sally summed up the concept of community involvement perfectly when she stated, “No matter where you are or who you are, it depends on the community and who you are in the community and how you fit into the community.”

Finally, the role of peer pressure in this phenomenon was studied. Overall, ten of the sixteen students did not feel that negative peer pressure played a role in their decision not to take an Honors or AP course. On the contrary, they said that their friends would encourage them. However, there were some reported incidents of negative peer pressure for some of the students. One student felt that African American students in the school play a role in students’ decisions not to take advanced classes. She said that they can be “demotivators” because they do not want to see other African American students succeed in school. Another African American student said that many of her African American friends are not on track for graduation, so she feels that they would be negative toward her because they would think that she is trying to act better than them.

On the same note, a Hispanic student said that her friends would think she is

“naïve” if she thinks she can take an AP course. They would also think that she is trying to “rub their faces” in the fact that she is smarter than they are. As a whole, the students did not feel that their peers play a major role in their decision not to take Honors or AP courses. However, since their peers are the ones who provide the students with their limited knowledge of what the advanced courses are all about, their peers may play a greater role than imagined.

Based on the findings in this study, a lack of information is the main factor that has led to the phenomenon of underrepresentation in Honors and AP classes. Whether that lack of information comes from misinformation from peers, lack of knowledge of their own AP potential, lack of information from their teachers, lack of input from their counselors, or lack of encouragement from families and the community, the basic vortex of the phenomenon comes down to one point – students do not have the information needed to make educated decisions about their course selections. While misunderstanding may be a by-product of this lack of information, there is no misunderstanding that this lack of information is the driving force creating the phenomenon of underrepresentation in Honors and AP class at this school.

Research Questions

Question 1. *Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?*

Based on the findings in the individual interviews and focus group meeting, students are choosing not to take Honors/AP courses because they are not given enough information to make educated decisions about their curriculum choices. None of the students interviewed knew about the *AP Potential* list, and none of the students knew that based

on their PSAT scores, they were predicted to be successful in at least one AP class. Since Honors courses are often precursors for AP courses, they were not taking Honors courses to prepare themselves to take AP courses in the future. While some students discussed other factors that relate to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4, there is no doubt that the overriding factor in their decision is lack of information. Students of all races and genders stated that if they had been told that they were on a list of students to who have potential to succeed in AP courses, they would have taken the course. This list overrode teacher recommendations or lack thereof, personal factors such as lack of work ethic, outside factors such as jobs, and peer interactions. As one student stated, he would take the AP class because the list shows that he is capable – it is no longer just his decision. When many of the students heard that they were on the *AP Potential* list, they were excited because it meant that someone had acknowledged that they were smart enough to do well in the “hard” classes. Just being given the information that they were on the list gave many of the students the “push” they needed to step outside of their comfort zones and take a more advanced class.

Question 2. *How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?*

Contradictory to what many people may believe, the students interviewed felt that teachers had little to no impact on the students’ decisions about taking Honors or AP classes. While none of the students interviewed were taking advanced courses, seven of the students said that a teacher had recommended that they take an Honors class, but none of the students followed those recommendations. However, that leaves nine students who had not been approached by a teacher. Of those, one student did feel that teachers do

single out White students to recommend to Honors classes, overlooking students of all other ethnicities, and a second student agreed in the focus group meeting. However, no other students saw a bias on the part of the teachers. The overall feeling was that once a student is in college prep classes instead of Honors classes, he will continue to take those courses, and while some teachers may recommend a move, usually both teachers and students do nothing to change the status quo.

Question 3. *How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes?* Two areas of cultural bias were discussed during the interviews. The first area of cultural bias concerned the African American students' interaction with their peers and their community. According to the students interviewed, the African American community in this school district does not encourage success in academics. African American students are more encouraged in other areas, such as athletics, and so being successful in school is not high priority for many of these students. One student, Shane, discussed the term "acting white." He said that while he does not hear this term in school, he does hear it used in the community when African American students are successful in school. He felt that it is very degrading and discourages students in the community from being successful in school. He went on to state that if African American students are going to be encouraged to take Honors or AP courses, "the teachers here will have to do it" because "the people outside, they tend to put us down."

Two other students said that they do see this discouragement carry over to the students in the high school. Paris said that African American students are "not pushed enough to broaden their knowledge" or to look out for "what is best for the future." She

said that many of her African American friends are very intelligent but they “do not show it through school.” Because these students are “uncomfortable,” they are the “demotivators” of others’ success. Bree, another African American student, said that her African American peers would not approve of her taking Honors courses because “their mindset is negative.” They are so concerned that they are not on track for graduation that they would think that anyone who is trying to excel in school would be trying to act “better than them.”

While there did seem to be an intentional bias in the African American community, the bias that students see in the Hispanic community seems to be unintentional. The Hispanic students all said that their parents would be proud of them if they were in advanced classes and did well in school. Mary said that she would be “looked up on” if she took an Honors course. However, an unintentional bias does come from a lack of knowledge on the part of the Hispanic students’ parents and community members. Since most of the parents in the local Hispanic community have not taken advanced classes themselves, they do not know to encourage students to take the advanced classes. Michaela student stated that many Hispanic students “think they don’t have to take [advanced classes] if their parents didn’t.” Many of the Hispanic students interviewed stressed that passing and graduating on time is much more important than taking harder classes. The lack of encouragement, the repeating pattern of past educational experiences, and the fear of failure are not intentional biases to education, but they seem to be hindering students from taking more advanced courses as much as an intentional bias.

Question 4. *How do past educational experiences of these potential students*

impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes? Of the sixteen students who participated in this study, only two are identified as gifted. One of the gifted students took some Honors courses during his freshman year, but they were difficult courses, and he chose to drop them. The second student identified as gifted said that he was never in the gifted program in elementary or middle school but that he did take on advanced class in middle school. He has never taken Honors classes in high school. A third student transferred to this high school in her sophomore year. Before she attended this school, she attended a magnet school for science and technology, but she is not identified as gifted. None of the other students are identified as gifted, so none have had the exposure to gifted classes in elementary and middle school. Of the students interviewed, four students had taken Honors classes in the past, but they dropped them or chose not to take them after their freshman or sophomore years in high school. While studies have shown that students who take gifted classes earlier in their school career tend to stay in advanced classes as they progress through high school, most of these students have not had that background, and the ones who did chose not to continue.

Except for the four students who have had a background in Honors classes, past educational experiences did not seem to have an impact on the other twelve students' decisions not to take the advanced classes. Instead, their past experiences seem to be all that they know; therefore, they were not aware of other educational experiences that are available to them. Once they were on the college prep track, they stayed on the college prep track. The impact is simple. Their past educational experiences have formed a pattern of education for them, and it was not until they found out about the *AP Potential* list that they knew that there were other educational doors open to them.

Summary

This chapter focused on sixteen students who have PSAT scores that placed them on The College Board's *AP Potential* list but who were not currently taking an Honors or AP course. All students participated in individual interviews, and the transcripts of the interviews were coded to find common themes. A focus group meeting was held so that more in-depth information could be obtained about the themes. Three general themes emerged. First, students do not have sufficient information about Honors and AP courses to make educated decisions about their course selections. Some students said that teachers have discussed Honors classes with them, so the students seem to hold counselors most responsible for their lack of information. The second theme that emerged is that while the students seem to learn most of their information about advanced classes from their peers, the viewpoints of their peers would not hold them back from the classes in most instances. In fact, many said that their peers would encourage them. The third theme that emerged supports both Crane's social contagion theory and Galster's neighborhood effects theory. Hispanic students supported the theories with their discussion of neighborhoods that do not discourage advanced academics but who, through their own examples, do nothing to encourage the advanced classes. Students see parents and other community members who did not take rigorous academic courses, so they see no reason to take the courses themselves. African American students stated that the local African American community does not see education as the most important aspect of a person's life, and those students who do excel in academics are often said to be going against the values of their neighborhood.

While these themes did emerge, the final aspect of the research uncovered the desire to excel in these students. When most of the students found that they were on the “smart” list, they felt proud of themselves and said that they would now consider taking an Honors or AP course. The research uncovered the universal desire of all people to be acknowledged for what they do well. The final chapter will discuss conclusions of the research, implications for the school, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary

Started in the 1950s in the United States, the Advanced Placement (AP) program was originally developed as a way to challenge only “high-achieving students at high-status high schools” (Schneider, 2009, p. 813). By bringing college-level courses into the most prestigious high schools, these elite students were given a greater chance to be accepted into the most elite universities (Schneider, 2009, p. 817). Though the program eventually expanded to more and more high schools, the elitist nature of the AP program continued until the 1970s when AP classes began to be viewed as separate islands within the high school, thus promoting racial segregation and inequality within the school (Schneider, 2009, pp. 819-820).

With the growing cultural diversity of the population of the United States, cries were sent out demanding changes to be made in the AP programs so that they would accurately reflect the growing diversity of each school’s population (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997, p. 203). The *Javits Act of 1994* called for schools to recruit and retain culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students for advanced programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, pp. 291-292). The efforts to recruit AP students of all ethnic and economic levels is also stressed by the College Board. In *The AP Equity Policy Statement* (2011), the College Board recognized the discrepancy between the diverse population in the United States and the population in AP programs. This statement called for “the elimination of barriers that restrict . . . students from ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups” and for schools to “make every effort to

ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of the student population” (College Board, 2011a).

Importance of AP classes. The role of an AP class is to provide a rigorous college-level class within the high school setting. If students receive a 3 or higher on a 5 point scale on a nationally normed test given at the end of the school year, they will receive college credit for that class. Depending on the college or university they choose to attend, they will be allowed to exempt one course for each AP test they pass. Therefore, AP students enroll in a university already having college credits on their transcripts. Even if the student does not receive a passing score on the AP test, he will still have had a year of a challenging curriculum that will give him a solid background for future college classes (Preston, 2009).

The importance of AP classes cannot be understated. Students who participate in AP classes develop study skills (Hertzberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, p. 204) and receive encouragement from an “academically supportive peer group” (Shiu, Kettler, & Johnsen, 2009, p. 59). In addition, AP courses have been called the “gateway to academic success” (Shiu, Kettler, & Johnsen, 2009, p. 77) since AP students usually score higher on college entrance exams, giving them a competitive edge in the recruiting process (Flowers, 2008, p. 125). These students gain a second edge in college acceptance because “nearly one-third of colleges and universities use AP as a criterion” to determine not only acceptance into the university but scholarship recipients as well (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). In Georgia where this study took place, both The University of Georgia and The Georgia Institute of Technology expect all students who are accepted in the university to have AP classes on their transcripts (Padgett-Harrison, personal

communication, July 2011). Once they enroll in colleges, students with an AP background are less likely to drop out of college (Preston, 2009, p. 38), and they are more likely to graduate from college in the expected time frame (College Board, 2011a, p. 3). Since it is predicted that nearly two-thirds of the jobs in 2014 will require some college education, but only one-fourth of the population will have a college degree, college success is vital to the success of today's students (Carnevale, 2008).

Purpose of this study. While research has proven that AP classes play a significant role in the future success of students, many students who have the potential to succeed in AP classes are choosing not to take those courses. The purpose of this study was to determine why the students in one north Georgia high school were making the choice not to participate in advanced Honors or AP classes.

Students in high school do not have to be identified as gifted in order to participate in Honors or AP classes. The choice to participate is left to the students to decide. Therefore, there can be no intentional separation of students by the school itself. However, in the school where this study took place, there is a discrepancy between the number of students who have the potential to succeed in Honors and AP classes and the number who actually participate in the Honors and AP program. The study recorded the voices of the students who were living this experience in order to better understand why the phenomenon is still occurring. While four main research questions guided the study, the students themselves turned the research in new directions, providing their unique insight into why students in this school are choosing not to take Honors and AP courses.

Research Question Findings

Question 1. *Why are students who meet the criteria set by the College Board as*

being potentially successful in Honors/AP classes choosing not to take these classes?

The response to this question comes to one simple conclusion – the students do not know enough accurate information about AP and Honors classes to make an educated decision about their course selections. The students’ main source of information comes from their peers, often peers who themselves know little to nothing about the classes. Students hear that the classes are “hard” and that there is “a lot of work” in them, so they shy away from fear of being unsuccessful in those classes. The fear of failure far surpasses their desire to be in more difficult classes. While a few of the students knew that a student can possibly receive college credit for taking an AP class, they had no idea of the significance of those classes to their future successes.

A second point that emerged is that the students interviewed felt that the Honors and AP classes were only for “smart” people, and they had no idea that they were in that category. When they were told that their names were on the list as having potential to be successful in an AP class, many of them were surprised that they were on the “smart list,” and almost all of the students said that they would have taken an Honors or AP class if they had been told they were on the list. This information made them more confident that they would be successful. Again, this points to the lack of information as being one of the main causes of the lack of participation in Honors and AP classes at this school. It is the most significant factor in the creation of this phenomenon.

Also of note, many of the students blamed themselves for not taking Honors or AP classes. They labeled themselves as “lazy,” “underachieving,” and “procrastinating.” They said that they did not want to do the extra work that they heard students have to do in the harder classes. They felt as if they should stick with the curriculum they currently

have since they would rather have a good grade in a College Prep class than a bad grade in an Honors or AP class. Fear of failure and not graduating on time were also mentioned as reasons why the students chose not to take advanced classes.

Question 2. *How does the level of support and encouragement on the part of the faculty impact underrepresentation of students in Honors/AP classes?* Research has shown that teachers often fail to recognize giftedness in students who are not of their own culture (Miller, 2009) and that they often evaluate students of low socioeconomic backgrounds differently (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Flowers, 2008). Since the makeup of the faculty is predominately White (95%), the expected outcome of this question was that students would see some type of unrecognized bias on the part of the teachers. However, this was not always the case in this study.

Seven of the sixteen students said that a teacher had mentioned an Honors class to them, but the students had chosen not to take the class. While this does leave nine students who said that a teacher had not talked to them about Honors classes, the students, themselves, did not recognize any type of bias on the part of the teachers except in one case. A young Hispanic female did state that teachers put White students into the Honors classes while smart students from other ethnicities are overlooked. This point was supported by a second student in the focus group meeting. If this is the case in one student's experience, more research may need to be done to determine if this is, indeed, a pattern. Perhaps the importance of teachers acknowledging the abilities of students was best summed up by Bree in the focus group meeting. She said that "one teacher can change . . . a student's life, whether they want to drop out or like whether they can go on to be a doctor. So it's all about how the teachers respond" to the students.

On a different note, the counselors were the group whom the students felt did not help them at all in their class choice decisions. The students reported a disconnect with the counselors, and not one of the students said that a counselor had ever told him about the AP Potential list or advised him that he should consider taking an Honors or AP class. The students saw the role of the counselor as a person who hurries students in and out all day, merely checking to make sure that they have the classes they need to graduate. They felt as if their counselors looked at them as merely ID numbers, giving the same response to all students without looking at the individual needs of each student.

In all, it seems that while there may be some unrecognized bias on the part of the faculty, the main finding is that there is little or no encouragement on their part for students to take Honors or AP classes. In the case of the counselors, there seems to be no support or encouragement at all in the eyes of the students. This leads to the need for further research of this phenomenon.

Question 3. *How can a cultural bias regarding the traditional educational system on the part of the students themselves impact their participation in Honors/AP classes?* This question has many facets when looking at how peers, family members, and the community may impact a student's participation in Honors and AP classes. The White students who participated in the study did not bring up any bias issues from peers, family, or community. However, this was not the case with the Hispanic students and the African American students.

The Hispanic students all said that their parents would be proud of them for being in the advanced classes and that Hispanic students would be "looked up on" in the Hispanic community if they took the harder classes. However, they also shared that

while they would not be discouraged in the community, neither would they be encouraged. Most of the Hispanic students are simply following the pattern of those around them, and since most people in their families have never taken advanced courses, they do not see the need to do so either, causing an unrecognized bias on their part. This supports Bandura's social cognition theory, Crane's social cognition theory, and Galster's neighborhood effects theory.

The African American students were much more aware of bias, not within their own families, but from their peers and their community. They saw an emphasis in their community on achievement in other areas instead of academics. Those African American students who do excel in academics run the risk of being taunted for "acting white," a term that one student called "downgrading." Their peers do not want to see them succeed in academics and are often "demotivators" to the other African American students. One student said that the students need to get support in school because they are not going to get it outside in the community, setting up a perfect example of Galster's neighborhood effects theory.

Question 4. *How do past educational experiences of these potential students impact their decisions to participate in Honors/AP classes?* Only four of the students interviewed had any past experience in Honors classes. All four dropped the classes because they felt that they were too hard, or they blamed themselves for being lazy and not keeping up with the required work load. None of the students had participated in gifted classes in their elementary or middle schools, but one student had been a part of a magnet high school before moving to her current school. None of the student seemed to feel that past experiences had impacted their decisions. Instead, they just seemed to be

satisfied with the state of their current classes. As one student stated, he “would rather have a good grade in regular class than a bad grade in a good class.”

Delimitations

The high school where the research was conducted gives the PSAT each year free of charge to all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The College Board then takes the PSAT scores of those students and publishes the students’ potential areas of AP success in the *AP Potential* list. This list indicates those students who, based on their PSAT scores, have a 70% chance or higher of scoring a 3 or above in at least one but up to twenty-five different AP courses (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). This publication provides a list of students who have a recognized potential for success in AP classes, thereby lending credence to the purposeful sampling population.

Limitations

The limitations of this study show the boundaries that were used to develop the study. These limitations are not problems for the study. They just provide information about the scope of the study.

Researcher. The fact that I am a teacher at this school is a limitation. All efforts to separate my opinions from the facts of the research were taken. Logs and memos were used to bracket my feelings, allowing only the facts to be recorded. It should also be noted that I had never met any of the students before they were interviewed, and they did not know me. Therefore, there could be no impact on the students’ grades whether they chose to participate in the research or not, nor could their participation impact their class placement for the current school year.

One school. While the purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon at

one school, the fact that only one was school was studied does limit the findings. The study found several reasons why students are not enrolling in Honors and AP classes at this particular school. However, further study within the same school system or within schools with similar cultural and socioeconomic populations should be conducted to see if the same trends are found throughout the system or within other schools.

Number of students. This was a phenomenological study in a school setting, and students served as the participants. Since the recommended number of participants in a phenomenological study is between five and twenty participants (Creswell, 200, p. 61), that number provided the base for selecting the number of students to participate in the study. Fifty invitations and initial interest surveys were sent out, with an additional ten invitations been handed out at a later date. For the final study, sixteen students participated in the individual interviews. While this is within the number of suggested participants, it reflects only 3% of the 469 students whose names appeared on the AP Potential list but who were not being served in any Honors or AP classes. The number was further limited when only five students came for the scheduled focus group session. While the themes discovered in the phenomenon are valid, a wider-ranging study could possibly find more information about the viewpoints of the underrepresented populations in the school.

Student schedules. The students participating in the study were all sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Many of them relied on the bus for transportation to and from school. Therefore, interviews had to be scheduled around their bus schedules. Because the students have a daily fifty-four minute lunch period, most of the interviews were scheduled during the students' lunch periods. They had time to eat lunch and to complete

the interviews. While I did have planning and lunch periods during two of the three of the lunch sessions, students who had fourth period lunch had to make arrangements for the interviews either before or after school. Since many buses arrive just before school and leave immediately after the last bell, this lack of interview time during the school day may have prevented some students from taking part in the study and the focus group meeting.

AP Potential list. The *AP Potential* list served as the base list from which the names of the participants were drawn. Since all students on the list had been identified as having the potential to be successful in an AP class, the list provided a solid base for determining names for the purposeful criterion sampling. While the list provided an unbiased list of potential names, it also, by its very nature, caused some limitations. Students who were absent on the day the PSAT was administered or who were not enrolled in the school at that time were automatically eliminated from the participant pool. There are also those students who do not test well on standardized tests but who do excel in the classroom. Therefore, some students who have the potential to excel in an Honors or AP class may not be included in the potential list because of their scores on the PSAT.

Implications

For students. Research has shown that students who take Honors and AP courses have a greater potential for success in life than those who do not (College Board, 2011b; Scott, Tolson, & Lee, 2010; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009). The students will soon be entering a work force that requires more highly trained professionals (Carnevale, 2008). Students need to learn in high school that taking a more

challenging course load while they are still in school may be difficult, but the rewards will be far-reaching. Honors and AP classes demand the work ethic, attention to detail, and drive for success that is needed in every area of the work force. AP classes help students get into college, and they help them get more scholarships. AP credits allow students to complete college at a more rapid pace, saving them both time and money. The effects of AP classes will benefit the students in many ways, but the students will never know the effects unless they participate in advanced classes. Students in this study felt that they were not given enough knowledge, especially about their own potential, to make a change to a more advanced curriculum. The students want encouragement from all of the adults in their world. Perhaps this study can help open the doors of Honors and AP classes to more students, giving them a head start on their futures.

For teachers. Students look up to teachers. They look to them for guidance, for knowledge, and for the encouragement they need to be successful in school. In most cases, the participants in this study had nothing negative to say about the teachers in the school. They said that their teachers give them the information they need to pass the class, but nine of the sixteen students (56%) who have recognized potential to be successful in AP classes have never been approached by a teacher with a suggestion to take a more advanced class. The students did not say that the teachers are doing anything to discourage them; however, they did note a lack of encouragement. Paris said that all that students want are “teachers who genuinely care.” Students need to know that someone believes in them before they can believe in themselves. Teachers need to be given the information about the importance of Honors and AP class, and they need access to the list of students who have AP potential. This will allow them to seek out the

students who have the ability to thrive in an advanced environment and to encourage those students to leave the safety of their current comfort zones. This will allow the teachers to help more students to succeed.

For counselors. The students in this study do not see the counselors as having any role in helping them determine their course selections. The students feel that the counselors are trying to do so much that they have no time to learn about the individual students and what they need. In the eyes of the participants, the counselors need to have time to get to know the students personally and to help them choose the classes that will be the best fit for them. The role of the counselor has changed over the past few years. They are in charge of testing administration, graduation requirements, and numerous other jobs that are key to the students' success, but the students do not see this side of the job. They want more. Students are looking for someone to guide them, advise them, counsel them, and encourage them. The role of the counselor may need to be reevaluated from the perspective of the school system, the school, the counselors, and the students.

For the school. Students interviewed felt that the school as a whole is doing a good job in working with students to make sure they graduate on time. All of the students interviewed were very happy at the school. They felt that academics are stressed. They mentioned the extra tutoring and the willingness of teachers to help students who are struggling. None of the students interviewed felt that the school was doing anything to hold them back from succeeding. However, they felt that more needs to be done to help those students who need a push to excel, not just those who need a push to pass.

The students in the study made one point very clear – more needs to be done to

inform students about what Honors and AP classes have to offer and to let them know that they are on the *AP Potential* list. The students had two main suggestions as to how the school could inform students about Honors and AP classes. Emory suggested using the weekly homeroom time to tell students about all of the different classes and the expectations of those classes. She said that just reading about a class on a piece of paper is not enough – someone must explain them. She went on to say that homeroom is a time to tell students, “This is what we’re offering, and it may not be for you, but at least sit down and listen.” She said that since homeroom is mandatory, there would be a captive audience.

Several students mentioned having a meeting at night for students and parents. The meeting would inform them about the different Honors and AP classes available, and all of the teachers should be there to talk about their classes. When asked if they thought anyone would attend a meeting like this, most students felt that there would be enough interest to warrant having the meeting. However, some students did say that some parents in the community might not feel comfortable, so something must be done to make everyone feel welcome.

The students felt that the school must do more to catch those students who are trapped in the middle. Attention is given to those students who need the extra push just to pass their classes, and students who excel in advanced classes are also recognized. They felt that something must be done to encourage those students who have the ability to excel but who are not getting the encouragement to do so. The students are not sure how it can be done, but they know the need is there.

For the community. The school serves very disparate communities. This research found that the ways the communities look at academic rigor and success are as varied as the communities themselves. However, the students from all communities need to be encouraged to take classes that will enable them to reach their greatest potential. A change is necessary in both communities, but how can these changes take place?

Students are being ostracized in the African American community for being successful in academics. In the Hispanic community, students are not being ostracized or discouraged, but they are also not being encouraged to take advanced classes because their families are often not aware of the opportunities available to their children. These are two opposite problems, but the results are still the same – the communities' views on education are keeping many minority students from entering the rigorous classes that will provide them with a solid academic background, and these views are leading to underrepresentation of minorities in Honors and AP classes. While an entire community cannot be changed, especially overnight, steps must be taken to enlighten both communities, and this can only be done by approaching individual students.

These minority students must be assured in the school that the advanced classes will be beneficial to them in their futures. They must be contacted individually and told of their potential for success so that they can make informed decisions. Their parents must be contacted and given information about their children, their children's abilities, and the possibilities open to their children now and in the future. The school must reach out to provide an educational antidote to the negative or uninformed community stances. By inviting families into the school and by providing them with vital information,

changes within the school may lead to changes within the neighborhoods, one student at a time.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this research study uncovered some themes that shed light on why some students at this school are not taking Honors and AP classes, there is still much to be discovered in this area.

Follow up on students. While the *AP Potential* does give a list of students who have potential to succeed in Honors and AP classes, the students have just that – potential. A research study is needed to follow up on students who choose to take an Honors or AP course because of their name is on the list. What struggles, if any, did the students have? Did the students complete the courses or drop them? What were the reactions of their families, peers, and community? Did they receive the support they needed? Did their views about school change? Research must be done to validate the use of the *AP Potential* as a tool for placing student in an Honors or AP class. This is a needed study.

Role of the counselor. Since the students in this study felt that the counselors' roles are not to advise students about what classes to take, it would be beneficial to look at the true role of the counselor. Do the central office and the school see the role of the counselor in the same way that the students see that role? How do the counselors view their role at the school? Has the role changed from one of guidance of students to one of supervising testing and overseeing graduation requirements? Insight from the counselors' viewpoints as well as the viewpoints of the students are needed to shed light on the true role of the modern school counselor.

Broadened scope. This study was very limited in scope. Further research needs to be conducted, including interviewing more students along with possibly interviewing teachers, counselors, and administrators as well. Having more insight into the phenomenon can only add a clearer view of how the current functioning reflects the school's vision on Honors and AP courses.

A second suggestion is to broaden the scope to include all high schools within the school district. Although some of the schools already have a high AP participation rate and some have a much more homogenous population, the use of the *AP Potential* list to find overlooked students could still bring new insights, especially from students who feel outside of the norm in high achieving schools.

Conclusion

The students in this study felt comfortable in their school and in their classes. In the eyes of the students, the school does a great job in providing them a safe environment where they can successfully graduate and move on into the world. They felt that the school supports all students in their needs for graduation. However, the students in the research were unaware that they had been identified by The College Board as having potential to succeed in more rigorous academic classes.

The students seemed to know little about the Honors and AP classes except what they had heard from their peers. They had heard that the classes were hard and that more work is demanded in those classes than in the classes in the college prep curriculum. Given this information, many of the students did not feel that Honors and AP classes were right for them because of either their self-proclaimed poor work habits, their lack of time to complete more difficult assignments because of outside obligations such as work,

or their fear of failing the class. An interesting note is that in a state where the HOPE scholarship provides college tuition money for students who graduate from high school with an overall B average, the HOPE did not play a role into these students' decisions not to take the more challenging classes that might possibly lower their final averages. The fear of failure overrode the fear of receiving a C in a class. These students were more concerned about high school graduation than future college tuition.

The community did seem to play a role in two groups of students. The findings from the Hispanic students support Albert Bandura's social cognition theory. While the Hispanic students said that their parents would be proud of them and never discourage them from taking advanced classes, they do not see any encouragement in the community. Since most of the community members did not take AP classes when they were in school, they do not see the need for their children to take them, and, in turn, the students also do not see the need. The goal in the Hispanic community is to see the children graduate. The students are following what they see, and a lack of information about and support of rigorous classes may be one of the motivating factors for students not taking AP and Honors classes.

In the African American community, more negativity was found. The students stated that it is not uncommon for students who excel in academics to be "put down" in their community for trying to be successful in a way that the community does not stress as being important. The students noted that often those who excel in school are separated from other members of the community, possibly being ostracized for "acting white." This supports Crane's social contagion theory.

The solution for both of these problems may come in Galster's neighborhood effects theory. If the community provides a "dosage" of negative influence, whether unintentional or intentional, the school must provide the "antidote" for that message. The school in this study does provide an antidote for community negativity about the need to graduate from high school, but the students did not feel that it does enough to provide information that could be an antidote against the community's misunderstanding about the importance of taking more advanced academic classes.

Students must be told that they have the potential to succeed. Teachers must be aware of the students who have the potential and must inform them of the more rigorous academic choices available to them. Counselors must be more proactive in informing students about how the Honors and AP course may impact their futures, not just their current grade point averages. Community members must be informed about the need for and the future impact of students to succeed in the more rigorous class. Students must be encouraged and supported, making them comfortable in making choices that may impact their future. As stated in Chapter 4, students of all races and genders said that if they had been told that they were on a list of students who have potential to succeed in AP courses, they would have taken the course. They need to be told that they can succeed, and they have to be put into a position where they can reach their greatest potential.

While the research into the phenomenon of underrepresentation in Honors and AP classes at this school brought to light many points, two main focal points emerged. Students need more information about their individual abilities and their accelerated academic possibilities at the school. The students also need encouragement. Armed with

the knowledge that they have the ability to succeed and reinforced with the encouragement that they can succeed, there is no limit to the potential of these students.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A – IRB Form and Approval

11/06

Ref. # _____

APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS
Liberty University
Committee On The Use of Human Research Subjects

1. Project Title: Why Students Are Choosing Not to Take Honors and AP Courses:
The Phenomenon in One Georgia High School
2. Full Review Expedited Review
3. Funding Source (State N/A if not applicable): N/A
4. Principal Investigator:
Susan Buice, 770-364-6233
Doctoral Student sbuice@liberty.edu
Liberty University Susan Buice
203 Crescent Moon Way
Canton, GA 30114
Name and Title Phone, E-mail,
correspondence address
5. Faculty Sponsor (if student is PI), also list co-investigators below Faculty Sponsor, and key personnel:
Dr. Rick Bragg Education Department
Chairman 404-934-8727
rbragg2@liberty.edu
Name and Title Dept, Phone, E-mail address
6. Non-key personnel:
Dr. Reginald Kimball Education Department
LU Committee Member (New number 678-646-
9938) rskimball@liberty.edu
Dr. Susan Padgett-Harrison Cherokee County, GA Board of
Education
Local Committee Member 770-479-1871

sph@cherokee.k12.ga.us

Name and Title

Dept, Phone, E-mail address

- 7. Consultants:
Dr. Judy Shoemaker

Education Department
863-604-0111
jshoemaker@liberty.edu
Dept., Phone, E-mail address

Name and Title

- 8. The principal investigator agrees to carry out the proposed project as stated in the application and to promptly report to the Human Subjects Committee any proposed changes and/or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others participating in approved project in accordance with the Liberty Way and the Confidentiality Statement. The principal investigator has access to copies of 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report. The principal investigator agrees to inform the Human Subjects Committee and complete all necessary reports should the principal investigator terminate University association. Additionally s/he agrees to maintain records and keep informed consent documents for three years after completion of the project even if the principal investigator terminates association with the University.

____ Susan M. Buice
Principal Investigator Signature

____ July 6, 2011
Date

____ Dr. Rick Bragg
Faculty Sponsor (If applicable)

____ July 6, 2011
Date

Submit the original request to: Liberty University Institutional Review Board, CN Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502. Submit also via email to irb@liberty.edu

APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

- 10. This project will be conducted at the following location(s): (please indicate city & state)
 Liberty University Campus
 Other (Specify): Cherokee High School 930 Marietta Hwy. Canton, GA 30114
- 11. This project will involve the following subject types: (check-mark types to be studied)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Normal Volunteers (Age 18-65)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Subjects Incapable Of Giving
Consent			
<input type="checkbox"/>	In Patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prisoners Or Institutionalized
Individuals			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Out Patients	X	Minors (Under Age 18)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Patient Controls	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over Age 65
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fetuses	<input type="checkbox"/>	University Students (PSYC
Dept. subject pool ____)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cognitively Disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Potentially Elevated
Risk Populations_____			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Physically Disabled		
<hr/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pregnant Women		

12. Do you intend to use LU students, staff or faculty as participants in your study? If you do not intend to use LU participants in your study, please check "no" and proceed directly to item 13.

YES NO X

If so, please list the department and/classes you hope to enlist and the number of participants you would like to enroll.

In order to process your request to use LU subjects, we must ensure that you have contacted the appropriate department and gained permission to collect data from them.

Signature of Department Chair:

_____ Dr. Rick Bragg

Department Chair Signature(s)

_____ July 6, 2011

Date

13. Estimated number of subjects to be enrolled in this protocol: 15-25

14. Does this project call for: (check-mark all that apply to this study)

X Use of Voice, Video, Digital, or Image Recordings?

Subject Compensation? Patients \$_____ Volunteers \$_____

Participant Payment Disclosure Form

Advertising For Subjects? More

Than Minimal Risk?

More Than Minimal Psychological Stress? Alcohol

Consumption?

- X Confidential Material (questionnaires, photos, etc.)? Waiver of Informed Consent?
- Extra Costs To The Subjects (tests, hospitalization, etc.)? VO2 Max Exercise?
- The Exclusion of Pregnant Women?
- The Use of Blood? Total Amount of Blood _____
Over Time Period (days) _____
- The Use of rDNA or Biohazardous materials?
- The Use of Human Tissue or Cell Lines?
- The Use of Other Fluids that Could Mask the Presence of Blood (Including Urine and Feces)?
- The Use of Protected Health Information (Obtained from Healthcare Practitioners or Institutions)?

15. This project involves the use of an **Investigational New Drug (IND)** or an **Approved Drug For An Unapproved Use**.

YES X NO

Drug name, IND number and company: _____

16. This project involves the use of an **Investigational Medical Device** or an **Approved Medical Device For An Unapproved Use**.

YES X NO

Device name, IDE number and company: _____

17. The project involves the use of **Radiation or Radioisotopes**:

YES X NO

18. Does investigator or key personnel have a potential conflict of interest in this study?

YES X NO

EXPEDITED/FULL REVIEW APPLICATION NARRATIVE

A. PROPOSED RESEARCH RATIONALE (Why are you doing this study?
[Excluding degree requirement])

The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons why students choose not to take Honors and AP classes even though they have been identified by the College Board's *AP Potential* publication as having the potential to be successful in these advanced classes. The study will consider if teachers fail to encourage students to take these classes. The study will also consider whether or not the cultural attitudes of these students could be primary contributors to the lack of student enrollment in higher level courses. Lastly, this study will consider if the students' past educational experiences have dissuaded them from taking more rigorous courses.

Research has shown that Advanced Placement classes can benefit students in several ways. First, AP students are more likely to attend college than those students who do not take Advanced Placement courses. In turn, those AP students who do attend college are more likely to receive college scholarships. Thirty-one percent of colleges look at participation in AP courses when determining scholarship awards (College Board, 2011). Also, AP students are more likely to graduate from college in four years, again saving them the money that an extra year of college will cost (College Board, 2011; Shiu, Kettler, & Johnsen, 2009, p. 61). Finally, statistics show that within the next two to three years, the majority of all jobs will require some type of college education (Carnevale, 2008; Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, more students must receive some type of college education in order to ensure a successful career in their future. These facts are especially vital for students from minority and low-income families.

Many of the minority students at the high school in this study are first-generation immigrants. They often work to help support their families who arrived here with nothing more than hope for the futures of their children. Enabling these students to attend a postsecondary school could be the beginnings of that future. Something must be done to bridge the gap between the two populations so that all students receive an equal chance to excel in the classes that will best prepare them for their futures.

If more students are placed in AP classes because of this study, if more students receive greater learning opportunities because of this study, and if more minority and low-income students are able to attend college because of this study, then the importance of the study is clear.

B. SPECIFIC PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

- In a step-by-step manner, using simple, nonscientific language, provide a description of the procedures of the study and data collection process. Also, describe what your subjects will be required to do. (Note: Sections C and D deal with type of subjects and their recruitment. That information does not need to be included here.)
- Students chosen for the study will be interviewed individually. The researcher will ask the questions from Appendix A, but other questions may arise from the course of the interview. The interview will be audio taped for accuracy. The interviews will take place at the school either before or after school or during the student's lunch period. The interview will last no longer than 30 minutes.
- Follow-up interviews will be conducted to clarify points. This interview will be strictly to clarify points; no new questions will be asked. It will take place either before or after school or during the student's lunch period. It will take no longer than 15 minutes.
- A focus group interview with all participants will also be conducted so that students' interactions may encourage them to share more about the phenomenon. The focus group will be conducted after the researcher has coded the themes but before she begins the final analysis of the results. There will be one focus group meeting, and it will be held immediately after school in the conference room of the school. It will last no more than one hour. See Appendix D for focus group questions.
- The researcher will transcribe the interview recordings.
- The researcher will keep a log, noting facts and observations from the interviews. This will not only allow to her separate facts from opinions, but it may also allow her to make new insights as she writes up the script from the recording.
- Once the interviews have been transcribed, horizontalization will be completed to find significant themes.

- Each theme will be highlighted in a different color to determine the first set of general themes.
- Two-tiered coding will be used to find more specificity within the themes and to provide greater insight into the research questions.
- The researcher will complete a textural description of the participants' experiences and a structural description to show how the phenomenon happened.
- The researcher will then combine the two descriptions to create a composite description that will include the essence of the participants' experiences, allowing the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

C. SUBJECTS

Who do you want to include in your study? Please describe in nonscientific language:

- The inclusion criteria for the subject populations including gender, age ranges, ethnic background, health status and any other applicable information. Provide a rationale for targeting those populations.
 - The exclusion criteria for subjects.
 - Explain the rationale for the involvement of any special populations (Examples: children, specific focus on ethnic populations, mentally retarded, lower socio-economic status, prisoners)
 - Provide the maximum number of subjects you seek approval to enroll from all of the subject populations you intend to use and justify the sample size. You will not be approved to enroll a number greater than this. If at a later time it becomes apparent you need to increase your sample size, you will need to submit a Revision Request.
 - **For NIH, federal, or state funded protocols only:** If you do not include women, minorities and children in your subject pool, you must include a justification for their exclusion. The justification must meet the exclusionary criteria established by the NIH.
-
- Since the study is a phenomenology, the participants will have all experienced the phenomenon being researched – the lack of participation in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The inclusion criteria will be students who attend the high school where the study will take place. They must be students whose names appear on the College Board's *AP Potential* list. This publication lists students who, based on PSAT scores, have the potential to be successful in AP classes. The students will be sophomores, juniors, and seniors who range in age from 15 to 18. They will also consist of a variety of ethnicities since the high school has a multicultural population.
 - The rationale for including this group comes from the purpose of the study. Since the purpose of the study is to determine why students who have potential to be successful in advanced classes choose not to take AP courses, the use of a purposeful criterion sampling is vital. This will give the researcher an unbiased list of students who have shown through past testing that they have the potential to be successful in AP classes. Only those students who have experienced the phenomenon can provide the researcher with an understanding of the essence of that experience.
 - Students excluded from the study will be those students whose names appear on the *AP Potential* list but who are not currently enrolled in AP classes because they have taken AP or Honors courses in the past and chose not to continue in the classes, whether they were successful or not. This purpose of this study is to determine why students have chosen never to enroll in an advanced class.

- Since a great deal of research looks at the exclusion of minority and low income students in AP classes, and since this school has a large population of minority and low income students, this research will also look at those factors. Therefore, students from all ethnicities and income levels must be included in order to validate the research questions.
- The maximum number of students involved in the research will be 25 students. This is the maximum number recommended by Polkinghorne (cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

D. RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS AND OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

- Describe your recruitment process in a straightforward, step-by-step manner. The IRB needs to know all the steps you will take to recruit subjects in order to ensure subjects are properly informed and are participating in a voluntary manner. An incomplete description will cause a delay in the approval of your protocol application.
- The *AP Potential* list is available to all teachers who teach Honors and AP classes. It is sent to the principal of the school who then distributes it to the AP and Honors teachers. The researcher will have direct access to this list. Students whose names appear on the 2010 College Board's *AP Potential* list will be given a survey at school. The sealed survey will be handed out during their English classes – the method the school uses to hand out all information to students. It will not appear unusual for some students to receive letters since this is the normal way of correspondence at the school. The survey will ask several basic questions (Appendix B).
 - Name
 - Grade
 - Age
 - Ethnicity
 - Are you currently taking an Honors or AP class?
 - Have you taken an Honors or AP class in the past here at Cherokee High?
 - If you have taken an Honors or AP course before, why did you choose not to continue taking advanced courses?
 - Would you be willing to participate in this research by meeting with me either before or after school or during lunch one day to answer some questions about Honors and AP classes?
- Students will return this general survey to a box in the front office of the school marked "Survey Responses". Those who return the survey will provide the researcher with a list of students who meet the criterion of being a student who has the potential to be successful in AP classes but who has never taken an AP class.
- From this list, 10 to 25 students will be chosen to participate. All students who return the survey and agree to participate will be put on a main list of participants. If 25 or fewer students respond, all students will be chosen to participate. If the number is over 25, the researcher will use purposeful criterion to ensure an equal mix of grade levels (10, 11, 12), gender, and ethnicity. The makeup of the participants should reflect the makeup of the general student body; therefore, the selection will be made to ensure that the population for the study is not composed entirely of one ethnic group, age group, or gender, if possible. The researcher will use the personal information given to ensure a mix of males and females from diverse ethnicities and grade levels.
- Once students have been chosen to participate in the research study, they will be given a Consent Form (Appendix C) explaining the process and guaranteeing their anonymity.
- Although participation in the research is voluntary, since most of the students will be under 18 years of age, all parents of the participants will also be asked to sign the Consent Form, making the parents aware of the process and assuring them of their child's privacy.
- Only students who return the Consent Form with both signatures (student and parent) will be included in the research process.

E. PROCEDURES FOR PAYMENT OF SUBJECTS

- Describe any compensation that subjects will receive. Please note that Liberty University Business Office policies might affect how you can compensate subjects. Please contact your department's business office to ensure your compensation procedures are allowable by these policies.
- There will be no monetary compensation to the participants. Participation is voluntary. The student will only receive snacks and drinks during the interviews and focus group sessions.

F. CONFIDENTIALITY

- Describe what steps you will take to maintain the confidentiality of subjects.
 - Describe how research records, data, specimens, etc. will be stored and for how long.
 - Describe if the research records, data, specimens, etc. will be destroyed at a certain time. Additionally, address if they may be used for future research purposes.
-
- All participants will be assigned an alias to assure their anonymity. The key list for the identity of the students will be kept separately from the other research information obtained. It will be locked in a filing cabinet in the classroom of the researcher. The key of aliases will be shredded three years after the completion of the research study.
 - No individual information will be shared with other members of the faculty or administration of the school.
 - All participants will sign a consent form (Appendix C) that ensures them that the information given by the specific individuals will never be shared with teachers, counselor, administrators, or parents.
 - All participants' parents will also sign the consent form (Appendix C) that ensures them that their child's individual information will not be shared with anyone else.
 - The research will report on the phenomenon as a whole instead of focusing on individual students.
 - All research surveys and participant information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet off of the school campus at the home of the researcher. All technology will be stored on a data file that will also be stored in the locked cabinet. None of the information will be shared with anyone. The information will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation.
 - The information obtained in this research will not be used for future research purposes.

G. POTENTIAL RISKS TO SUBJECTS

- There are always risks associated with research. If the research is minimal risk, which is no greater than every day activities, then please describe this fact.

- Describe the risks to participants and steps that will be taken to minimize those risks. Risks can be physical, psychological, economic, social, legal, etc.
 - Where appropriate, describe alternative procedures or treatments that might be advantageous to the participants.
 - Describe provisions for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of adverse effects to participants or additional resources for participants.
- The risk to the participants is minimal.
 - The only risk is that the information the participants share may not shine well on the teachers and students in the school, their peers, or the members of their family or community. If the information they share is not held in confidentiality, then the students could be ostracized by their family, their peers, their neighborhood, and the school community.
 - To minimize this risk, the researcher will be meticulous in insuring that no information obtained in the research process will be shared with anyone else during the research process. However, the researcher cannot assure that students who participate in the focus group will keep the confidentiality and privacy of the other students. This information is included in the consent form. It will also be clearly stated to all students in the group.
 - All students will be assigned an alias or a number to ensure further ensure their anonymity.
 - All information will be held in strictest confidence.

H. BENEFITS TO BE GAINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL AND/OR SOCIETY

- Describe the possible direct benefits to the subjects. If there are no direct benefits, please state this fact.
 - Describe the possible benefits to society. In other words, how will doing this project be a positive contribution and for whom?
- There will be no immediate benefits to the participants. However, if the students choose to enroll in AP classes the following year, they will reap the benefits of a more rigorous education as well as the future educational and career benefits that could result from their participation in AP courses. This may be especially true for minority and low income students who would greatly benefit from this educational opportunity.
 - The benefits to society will come several years in the future. Studies have shown that students who participate in AP classes in high school are more apt not only to attend college but also to graduate from college (Flowers, 2008). Since recent studies have shown that “nearly two-thirds of jobs in 2014 will require at least some college education” (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 1), the long-term benefit of this study to society will be that more students may receive the college education that will prepare them to become the work force of the future.
 - This study could bring about positive benefits for the students and for society.

I. INVESTIGATOR’S EVALUATION OF THE RISK-BENEFIT RATIO

Here you explain why you believe the study is still worth doing even with any identified risks.

- The risks to the students will be minimal; however, the benefits could far outweigh any risks. If, because of this study, more of these students take AP courses and better prepare themselves for the future, then the rewards are obvious.
- If the findings in this study cause a change in the recruitment and retention of students in the AP program, allowing even more students in the future to reap the benefits of a more rigorous high

school education, then the study could have a long-range benefit for the entire community. This would definitely be worth the minimal risks of this study.

J. WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

See Appendix C

K. WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT OR SIGNED CONSENT

Waiver is not be requested

L. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS *(to be attached to the Application Narrative)*

M. COPIES:

For investigators requesting **Expedited Review** or **Full Review**, email the application along with all supporting materials to the IRB (irb@liberty.edu). Submit one hard copy with all supporting documents as well to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, Campus North Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502.

IRB Approval Letter

IRB Application 1138.081111: Why Students are Choosing Not to Take Honors and AP Courses: The Phenomenon in One Georgia High School

Actions

To:

M

[Buice, Susan](#)

Cc:

M

[Bragg, Rick](#); [IRB, IRB](#); [Garzon, Fernando](#)

Attachments:

(2)[Download all attachments](#)

[Annual Review Form.doc \(34 KB\)\[Open as Web Page\]](#); [Change in Protocol.doc \(32 KB\)\[Open as Web Page\]](#)

Good Morning Susan,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. Attached you'll find the forms for those cases.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project. We will be glad to send you a written memo from the Liberty IRB, as needed, upon request.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

Appendix B – School System Approval

From: Sarah Tusing

Actions

To: Susan Padgett-Harrison; Susan Buice

Wednesday, July 20, 2011 12:21 PM

[The permission to conduct research] has been approved and I have placed a copy of the signed permission form in the county mail to Ms. Buice and [her principal].

Thank you.

Sarah

Sarah Tusing, Secretary to

Dr. Gayle McLaurin

Director of Assessment

_____ County School District

ESA - Building G - Room G05

770-721-6206

770-479-4938 (Fax)

Appendix C – Consent Form

Consent Form

Why Students Are Choosing Not to Participate in Honors and Advanced Placement
Classes: A Phenomenon in One Georgia High School

Susan M. Buice
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study of why students are choosing not to participate in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes at Cherokee High School. You have been selected as a possible participant because your name appears on a list of students who have the potential to be successful in advanced classes. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Susan Buice, Cherokee High School teacher and doctoral candidate at Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to learn what students think are the reasons why students at Cherokee High School who could be successful in more rigorous classes, such as Honors and AP classes, are choosing not to take these advanced academic classes.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- I will ask you come in for an individual interview to ask you some questions about Honors and AP classes. I will audiotape our conversation to ensure accuracy. The interview will take place either before school, after school or during your lunch period. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes. I will give you an alias name or a number so that your name will never be given out to anyone.
- I will then ask you to meet with me again after I have written down notes from our interview to make sure I have written down everything correctly from our interview. This will be a very brief meeting scheduled at your convenience.
- I will ask for you to meet with me one last time with a group of other students who have been chosen to participate in the study. This will give you a chance to discuss with other students how you feel about the study. This will be conducted before or after school since all participants will not have the same lunch period. This will take no longer than one hour.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

There are very minimal risks to your participation in this study. There are no more risks than you would encounter in everyday life. Your identity will be concealed unless you report some type of abuse to me. If so, I am required to report that abuse. Otherwise, I

will not reveal your identity to anyone at the school or in the community. The only way it could be revealed is by another student whom you might meet in the focus group.

There are many benefits to participation. You are free to give your opinion about the classes at this school and about the changes that you would like to see made. This will be done anonymously so there will be no repercussions to you. You will also learn more information about Honors and AP classes, and you may choose to participate in Honors and AP classes in the future.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All data and tape recordings will be stored in a locked filing cabinet off of the school campus. No one will have access to this information except the researcher who will use the information only to write her doctoral paper for Liberty University. Your individual name will not be revealed in any way, either in written or oral forms, by the researcher. However, she cannot guarantee that other students who participate in the focus group will keep the confidentiality and privacy of all of the other members of the group. The tapes will be erased and the interview papers will be shredded seven years after the publication of the final dissertation

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or Cherokee High School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Susan Buice. You may ask her any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at Cherokee High School (room 216) or at susan.buice@cheorkee.k12.ga.us, or at 770-364-5233.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____
(*If minors are involved*)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D – Initial Interest Survey

My name is Susan Buice, and I am a teacher here at _____ High School. I am working on a research project, and I need some students to help me in that process. You have been chosen to receive this survey to determine your possible interest in participating in the research. Please answer the survey questions below and return this survey to the box in the front office marked “Survey Responses.” Please return the survey by _____ even if you do not wish to participate in the research project.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Name _____

Grade _____

Age _____

Lunch Period _____

Race (Please circle one)

White Black Hispanic Asian American Indian Multiracial Other

Are you currently taking an Honors or AP class? Yes No

Have you taken an Honors or AP class in the past here at Cherokee High? Yes No

If you have taken an Honors or AP course before, why did you choose not to continue taking advanced courses?

Would you be willing to participate in this research by meeting with me either before or after school or during lunch one day to answer some questions about Honors and AP classes? Yes No

Appendix E – Interview Questions

1. What do you know about Honors/AP courses?
2. Have you ever considered taking an Honors/AP class?
3. If yes, why did you choose not to take the course? If no, why not?
4. Has a teacher or a counselor ever talked to you about taking an Honors/AP course?
5. What do your friends who are taking Honors/AP courses say about the classes?
6. Would you like to take an Honors/AP course next year? Why or why not?
7. Would you be more likely to take an Honors/AP course next year if you were told that you had been recommended? Why or why not?
8. What outside factors would enter into your decision whether or not to take the class?
9. What do you think your friends will say if you decide to take an Honors/AP course?
10. What do you think your family will say?

Appendix F – Observation Procedures

- I will create a standard set of questions for the basic interview.
- I will conduct one-on-one interviews.
- I will audiotape the interviews and transcribe notes using Dragon voice recognition software.
- I will mark the date and time the interview begins and ends.
- I will make some general notes that remind me of a specific area of focus.
- I will also audiotape the focus group discussions.
- I will keep a log of all proceedings, noting what happened and my reactions.

Appendix G – Focus Group Questions

1. What do you think are the greatest factors that cause students not to take Honors/AP classes at this school?
2. What do you think this school can do to encourage more students to take Honors/AP classes?
3. What do you think the counselors can do to encourage more students to take Honors/AP classes?
4. What do you think teachers can do to encourage more students to take Honors/AP classes?
5. What can the students do to encourage other students to take Honors/AP classes?
6. Does the community outside of the school encourage students to take Honors/AP classes? If not, what can be done to inform people outside of the school of the importance of Honors/AP classes?
7. What do you hope this research project does for the school?

Appendix H – Individual Interview Transcripts

Student One - Clara

October 4, 2011

Buice: Okay, it says it is recording, so we are good to go. Your name will not be anywhere on this, so I will record you as Student One. What do you know right now about an Honors or AP course?

Clara: Well, I know that they are for advanced, for people who are smart.

Okay. Do you know anything else?

That they are helpful for your college applications. It helps you.

Okay, anything else you can think of?

No

No? Okay, well let me ask you this. Have you ever thought about taking an Honors or AP course?

I thought of it, but I didn't take it because I was stressing with math, and I needed to focus on one thing and not another.

And what course did you think about taking it in.

I was thinking of taking Honors Brit Lit or something.

Okay, so in the English category. Brit Lit or something like that. Okay.

I guess you answered my next question because it was why did you choose not to do it, but you said that you felt like you needed to focus.

I needed to focus more on my weak points.

Okay, so you wanted to focus on your weak points. And your weak point is math?

Math

Mine, too. Have you ever had a teacher or a counselor who has come to you and said you should try an Honors or AP class?

No, I haven't.

No. Have you been at this school all 4 years?

All four years.

All four years, but no one has... What about at elementary school? Did you take any gifted classes at elementary school or middle school?

Uh, I don't really know cause I went to elementary school in California, so I don't really ... I didn't know the program, I guess.

Okay. So do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP?

I have some.

Okay, and what do they say about it?

They say it's fun and it's hard at the same time.

Okay, anything else?

That they enjoy the class.

They do enjoy them? Okay. So my question for you won't apply because you're a senior, right?

Yes

My next question would be if you would consider taking one, but since you are not going to be here, I guess it is too late to talk about that part of it.

Yea (laughs).

Let me ask you this: If you had been told last year before registration that you qualify to take these courses, would you have been more apt to take it if somebody said, “ Hey, look. You’re on this list?”

I would. I would because like I said, it would look good on my college application, and it’ll help in the long run.

And why do you think it will take someone saying it to you instead of you just deciding to do it?

Encouragement, I think

Encouragement?

Yea

All right. Are there other outside factors outside of school that would enter into the fact that you might or might not have chosen to take one.

No, like all I do is go home and study, and that’s about it.

So no outside work or anything?

No

It was more about your concern about not getting in over your head?

Yea

Okay. What do think would happen if you went to your friends right now and said, “I’m going to take an AP course or I’m going to take an Honors course.” How do you think your friends would react to that?

They would encourage me to do it because they know that I have the potential to do it.

Okay, do you hear anyone put down anyone because they are taking Honors or AP courses or say anything to them or give them a hard time because they are taking those courses?

No

Okay, good! Now, what about your family? What would your family feel about your taking these harder courses?

My family would feel proud of me, and they would encourage me to take them, and they would help me succeed in taking Honors or an AP class.

Now that you are about to be graduated from here, do you regret that you did not take any?

I did. I do. It would have been another life experience for me.

Let's just talk now. I've got my questions out of the way. Let's just talk about Honors and AP. Is there anything out there in the world that you hear about Honors and AP that I haven't asked about?

Not really. Just that it like...

No negatives? Mostly just positives?

Just positives.

Well that's a good thing to hear. I didn't know that. Do you think that if somebody started off like in ninth grade in one, they would be in one – like you said you were thinking about taking one your senior year – do you that is what caused you to hesitate because you hadn't taken any before that?

Yea, like I didn't think of it in ninth grade, but now that I'm a senior and I look back, I regret not taking an AP or Honors class because it would have been like

... It would have been helpful, and it would have been... what's that word? I don't know. I guess it would have been fun and a new learning experience.

So when you go back and you said you had to focus on math because math is your weak spot, do you think that the workload is what cause you not to take it?

Yea, cause I heard like they give out like a lot of work, and I so just kept thinking to myself, if I just concentrate on an Honors class, I would fail math.

Okay. So you've got to do that trade off?

Yes.

All right, you have been really helpful. I just wanted to find out if there is something here that we're doing that's causing people to not take it. But what I hear from you is that personally, it was your internal decision, but maybe if somebody had encouraged you, it would have happened. If you had known your name was on that list, you might have said, "Hey, I'm going to give it a try" somewhere along the way.

Uh-huh

Well, that gives me an idea that maybe we need to do some more encouraging?

Yes

Well, let me ask you this. What can we do as a school for those kids who are in ninth and tenth grade and who haven't taken an Honors class?

You guys can have a meeting, like with the class, and encourage and talk to them about Honors and AP classes and encourage them to take them.

And you said that when you met with your counselors for your yearly, they never...

They never.

Student Two - Kaitlyn

October 4, 2011

Buice: Okay. First of all, what do you know about Honors/AP courses? What have you heard about them?

Kaitlyn: The way I see it is like where the more smarter people are at.

All right, smarter people are there.

Yes, that's how I feel, and like, probably they learn faster or they teach them ahead of the other students.

Okay. Anything else you know about them?

No

Well, let me ask you: Have you ever considered taking an Honors/AP class?

Yes

Yes, in what area?

Well, I can say I'm a math geek, so I would like to be in math.

A math geek. All right, now have you have any courses in middle school where you were in accelerated courses?

No, I would always be in like normal.

Normal. But do you make good grades there?

Yes

You said that you considered taking a math course? Why didn't you take it? You considered, you said, math. Why did you choose not to?

Well, the teachers don't put me in that class. Probably I might fail it, or I just need to take my time, and I am fine in my normal classes.

So you need to work a little slower?

Yes.

Is that what you said? You need to work a little slower. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you said you need to take your time.

Yes.

But no teacher has ever talked to you about taking an Honors class?

No.

Do you make A's in those classes?

Yes

So you make A's, but no one has ever talked to you about taking those classes.

Um, do think if a teacher. . . you said no. Has a counselor ever talked to you about taking those classes?

No.

Nobody has said anything at all about it to you. So do you think that if they had, you would have taken a class if recommended.

Yes, I would like to.

Yes, you would like to.

Yes

Why do you think you would like to?

Cause I want to see how far I can go and see if I can be at that same level. And be like okay, I'm smart. (Laugh)

Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses? Anyone you hang out with or know?

I'm not sure.

So of those people that you sit around and talk to, do any of them ever talk about AP or Honors or wanting to take AP or Honors?

There are some kids that are in Honors or AP, and they're like, "Oh, it is so hard."

But I don't think it's hard; it's you just have to memorize stuff. That's the hard part.

What would your friends say if you went to them and said, "Hey, guess what? I am going to take an Honors Math or an AP math next year?"

I don't know. They would probably be surprised because they don't expect it.

Why do you think they don't expect it?

Cause they probably haven't been in one, and they might think I will be like kind of naïve. That I have something. They might think that I will be more smarter than them, and then I will be rubbing it in their face.

So if they thought that you were smarter than them, they would give you a hard time about it?

Yes.

Let's just put that scenario out there then. So if you had a chance to take it, would you take it anyway knowing that your friends might give you a hard time?

I wouldn't care cause it's my choice, and it's like I said, it's going to see how far I can go.

Good. Okay, what about your family? What do you think they would say if you came home and said, "I really want to take this AP course?"

They would ask me if I'm really sure about it, and if I do want to, they'll be proud because they know that's what I like. I like math.

And that's the good thing about high school, too. You don't have to do everything else. You can just do math if that's what you're good at. So we've talked about that maybe you would like to take one next year if you could. So let me make sure that I've got this right because some of these questions kind of repeat. If the counselor when you went in for your regular meeting or if Ms. T_____ told you that you really needed to take one, you would be more apt to take one, right?

Yes.

So if your teacher last year had told you to take one, you would have done it at that point, too?

Yes

So far no teacher or counselor has mentioned it to you, right?

No

I am going to put, "Yes, not mentioned." So do you have any outside factors outside of school that might change your mind or keep you from taking AP classes?

No

Do you work?

No

So you would have the time to study for the class and do the work you need to do.

Yes.

That's good. We talked about your friends and family, so now my question for you is - do you have anything else you want say in general about how the program is set up or any questions you have about AP or Honors or anything you want to add?

Like, I would like to ask like why, how come so many kids get the opportunity to go into AP, and they don't ask them if they want to, and they don't ask other kids that have high A's in every class, they don't ask them if they want to.

All right, so why some kids get to go and others don't?

Um-hm

Do you think there's any bias in the way they choose kids to go into these classes?

Yes, kind of.

Okay, and that's okay. What do you see?

Like, I don't want to offend anybody.

That's okay; you are not going to offend me. I promise you.

Cause I see like more White people there. Cause it doesn't mean that just White people can be smart. There's some Hispanic, African Americans, Asians. It doesn't matter. There's a lot of smart people that they, they don't realize.

I agree. Now let me ask you this while we're on that. Do you think the teachers realize what they're doing or they just don't . . . What do you think causes it? What do you see from a student's perspective?

I don't know . I really don't know how they see the person. Maybe they might think "Well, he's from a different place. He might now know anything."

Okay. I am glad you brought that up. You are never going to offend me. You can say anything and be as honest as you want to be about it. You also brought up that there are a lot of groups; there's a lot of white people sitting in there, not many Hispanics, African Americans, or Asians. Is there anything else you want to add because that was a really good point?

No, I think that's all.

Obviously, I don't know anything about math because I teach English, so I can't tell you a thing. But, if at the end of this process, you were offered a chance to be that person who got to go in there, how do you think you'd feel if you were one of the few Hispanic people?

I'd be honored.

You'd be honored.

Yes, because it would be a great opportunity for me to show other people, "Yes, I did it, and you can do it, too."

Do you speak Spanish?

Yes

Do you take Spanish classes here at Cherokee?

Yes

Have you ever thought about taking AP Spanish?

No

Why not?

Because I don't want people to think that it might be easier for me. But it's not cause I can speak it, but it is different when you can read it and write it.

Has your Spanish teacher ever talked to you about taking an AP Spanish class?

No

What Spanish are you in right now?

Three

Do you do well in there?

Yes, I have to ... I want to write it well and I want to speak it and read it well.

I think you are right. People speak English all the time, but they might have a hard time reading it and writing it. So you might speak Spanish fluently but have a hard time writing it well or reading it well like they do in their English classes.

That's why so many people ask us why do we take Spanish. It is like us asking y'all, "Why do y'all take English?"

Exactly. That is a very good point. I agree with that. You are very well spoken.

Thank you.

Is there anything else you want to add?

No

Well, I think that you have opened up some doors about some things, and thank you for opening up and sharing these things with me. If you think of anything else, just let me know. Thank you.

Thank you.

Buice: All right, I will list you as #3 since you are my third interview. Tell me a little bit about what you know about Honors or AP classes.

Garrett: Well, I know that Honors and AP courses are classes for people who may have, who do well in school or who may have – people who are capable of doing it.

Okay, do well or work hard. So, but you were in an Honors course or an AP course at some point, right?

Yes

What did you take?

I took Honors Biology, Honors Lit. I took Honors World History, and I also took Honors American History and Currents Issues.

All right, so you have had about five Honors courses?

During my freshman year, I had all Honors courses. Since then there might have been a few but most have not.

So why did you stop?

Um, because I'm an underachiever. (Laughing)

(Laughing) So okay, tell me what you mean by that?

I'm capable of doing it, but I don't do it.

Okay

I'm, I'm lazy basically. Too much effort.

All right. Did anything else go into your decision about not taking those courses?

It didn't seem necessary.

It didn't seem necessary. All right. What about teachers when you said that you weren't going to take them any more. Did teachers encourage you or not encourage you?

Um, I don't know. I didn't really ask them about it.

What about your counselor?

I don't talk to my counselor.

It was a decision you made on your own?

Um – mostly it was because I didn't do as well as expected because I didn't do my work.

What about your parents?

Uh, they would prefer that I did my work and be in AP classes, so they do want me to be in them.

Uh-huh.

But if I'm not going to do my work in AP classes, then they don't want me to be in them.

Because they don't want you to fail?

(No answer)

Did the thought of the HOPE Scholarship play into this?

No

No. So it wasn't trying to keep up a GPA for HOPE. It was just trying to pass?

I guess.

You guess because you're not going to doing your work. – I don't know what your grades are, but if you are not doing work, I think this would keep your grades down.

Yes, in Honors classes.

In Honors classes? So why do you think you are successful in college prep classes and not in Honors classes?

Um, less effort is required, so it is a lot easier to do it, and cause, because I have more time to myself, I am happier doing the work.

Oh, okay. Let me ask you this. As you sit in a college prep class, since you have been in both worlds – Honors world and college prep world, do you see people sitting in that college prep class that you think are in your same boat. Man, they should be in an Honors class.

Um, I don't know the other people well enough to answer that.

Okay. Because sometimes I can see kids from a teacher's standpoint, and I just wondered if as a student you saw that. Okay. All right, a lot of these questions, because you have been in so many Honors classes, are not going to impact you, but I am going to go through and see if anything does. Um, you asked – you told me why you chose not to take them or to continue to take them. It's because of the work.

I'm lazy.

I don't want to say lazy, but I am going to say that you say that you are lazy. And you said that the teachers and the counselor didn't talk to you. When you decided to drop, they just let you drop basically.

Yes, um, I remember having a conversation with one in sophomore year about college, and that's it.

That's it. All right. Okay, so what about your friends. Do you have friends who are still in Honors and AP courses?

Yes

What do you hear them say when they talk about Honors and AP courses?

Uh, I don't hear them talk about them.

They just don't talk about it at all?

Not really.

All right. Now what grade are you in?

Um, I'm not sure

Okay

Because my parents pulled me out in the middle of last year to home school me and then they found out that they couldn't teach me anything, so they sent me back which lost me a whole bunch of credits.

So you're somewhere in your. . .?

Somewhere.

Somewhere in your junior year you think?

Yeah, I'm supposed to be a senior.

Okay, but somewhere in the junior year because of that since you were home schooled for a while. So you'll be back here next year or you'll go to summer school?

Um, summer school won't make up for it.

Okay,

Not that many. I may or may not be here next year if they allow me to take extra credit connect courses on APEX. Then I may graduate this year.

Okay, so then there's no point in me asking about the fact that you might take an AP or Honors class next year because you're not going to be here.

No

Let me ask you this. Let's go back to the time when you decided to drop. Would you have been more apt to have stayed in those courses if a teacher had talked to you like that you one you said. If one had said, "You really need to stay; if you will just put forth the extra effort, you can do it." Or were you just determined that you were going to drop it?

Well, I already know that could have done it if I had put forth the effort. And so

...

So it wouldn't have made any difference at all?

Not really.

Student Four – Sally

October 6, 2011

***Buice:** . I am going to ask you some questions. Anything you want to elaborate on, anything you want to throw in there, just let me know. At the end I will just let you talk to me about some things.*

Sally: All right.

Okay. Now, what do you know about Honors and AP courses?

I know that they're very difficult.

Okay

I know that in AP you might be able to get college credits.

Okay

And, they have a trip every year in Lit I think, for Honors Lit, but I don't really know that much. I know that they do a lot of essays and stuff. It is a lot of hard work.

All right. Now, have you ever been in an Honors or AP course?

No. Like in middle school, I was in Advanced reading and math, but I didn't make it to anything else.

Were you, um, at T_____ (Middle School)?

Yes.

So you were at T_____. When you were there, were you in what they call the gifted classes or just advanced classes? Or is there even a difference in the two?

Just advanced. I wasn't in accelerated or anything. I was just in advanced.

In the advanced. Okay, well good. All right, um, so have you ever considered then taking an Honors or AP class here at [this school]?

Yes

Yes, all right. In what?

Maybe like literature or world history because I like both of those.

Okay. So, did you just think about it and the thought left, or what went through your mind about it?

Yeah, like I, I thought really hard about it, but I'm not good with responsibility and like doing homework and stuff, so I knew that I couldn't like fulfill like what I needed to do in that class, so I just didn't take it.

Just didn't take it. All right. Well, that was my next question – why you didn't. So it's the responsibility on your part – not on anything else. You just felt like you couldn't handle it.

Yeah

Well, has your counselor ever talked to you about taking Honors or AP classes?

No

No. Has a teacher ever mentioned to you about taking an Honors or AP course?

No.

So no there and no there. All right, do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Yes, I have several.

Several. So what do they say about it?

They say that they're really difficult, but most of them are trying to graduate early, so they like to take those classes so that they can get college credits.

Okay. Do they say anything else about them?

Not really.

Do they say anything that would make you want to take or that would keep you from taking a course?

Yes, the hard work. Like all the work that has to be done, and some of the teachers. Like, I don't know who the teachers are, but they are like very strict from what they've told me.

Okay. So that says a no to you then?

Yeah (Laughing)

Okay. Um, what grade are you in?

I'm a sophomore.

You're a sophomore, so you have a couple of years to go. Would you consider taking an Honors or AP course next year?

Maybe.

The same areas?

Probably, yes.

Okay, um. Would you be more likely to take it next year if your teacher says to you, "Hey, I think you need to take this."

Yes

Why?

Because it shows that the teacher is acknowledging the fact that I don't belong in that class. I belong in a different class.

And you say yourself that it's responsibility that kept you from it, but if the teacher says you need to go, that you would. . . Would you be able to take the responsibility then?

I would try to take the responsibility.

So that would weigh more than your decision about your responsibility?

Yes

All right. Well, what about the counselor? What if a counselor came to you and said it to you?

She knows all of the students, and she has our scores, and if she says that I will do well in the class, I would, and I might even be able to get into a different college.

So you would be even more likely if the counselor said to. Is that right because I missed the very first thing that you said?

Yes

All right. Mainly you said because of college and she has all of your scores.

Yea

So you are not planning to take anything next year, but if somebody said, "Hey, you should," you would consider it.

Yes

Okay, I just wanted to make sure that I heard everything right with all of the commotion that is going on here (with the announcement). Just wanted to be sure. Do you have any outside factors that would keep you from taking the class, like work, commitments outside of school, anything like that?

Well, I want to work when I turn 16. And, I go to church every Saturday and every Tuesday. And I do other stuff outside of that, but not really.

Not really?

No

So you could probably work it around to get everything done?

Probably

Okay. Um, so if you went to your friends and you said, "Hey, I'm going to take an Honors course next year, or an AP course," what do you think that they would say to you?

Well, some of my friends would ask me why, and they would really get me to think about like, if it would be a good thing for me to take it or not. Like, would I have the responsibility and encouragement to do it. And the others, some of my other friends would just be like, "so you want to graduate early." And they would have no idea what they're talking about. (Laughing)

Would anybody give you a hard time for doing it or try to dissuade you from doing it?

Nope. No, all of my friends have told me that they think that I should not be in the class that I'm in. They think I should be in the higher level.

Do you make good grades in those classes?

Sometimes. I have a hard time doing homework and stuff. So, if I did my homework, I would be making all high A's in all of my classes.

So it's not the work load or the difficulty of the work? It's just that responsibility factor that you talked about earlier.

Yeah, getting myself to do it.

Do you think you would be more motivated to do it if you were in a class that pushed you more and you had everybody around you motivated?

Yes. I think so. Yes.

So if you went home and told your family, “Hey, I’m going to take an Honors course next year,” and your family knows your history of responsibility or whatever, what do you think your family would say?

Well, I think my mom would, she would like take the – the – she would try to motivate me into doing it. And then my dad, he would just, he would do the same thing and probably my grandparents would. And my brother would tell me how hard it was, but then he’d help me with it probably.

So they would all support you if you decided to do it?

Yes.

There’s an AP Psychology, and are you in band?

No

Well, there is an AP Music Theory class. But I don’t know how detailed that is with music, but we do have that. And yes, you can take AP Psychology without having like an AP History or any of those things.

Okay, cause I am taking guitar, and my friend transferred out of Music Theory because he said it was too hard.

Okay, so you have heard that about the AP class in music. Music is too hard?

Yeah

Okay, all right, what else have you heard? Is there anything else you want to ask about?

No

I want to make sure that I have everything covered here. So you told me what you know about AP and Honors courses and that you have considered it. Um, and it sounds like to me that you are considering AP Psychology, too, maybe at some point.

(Nods head.)

Uh –huh. Responsibility? No one has ever . . . Why do you think a teacher or counselor hasn't talked to you about it?

Because I don't do my homework. And they know that there's a lot of stuff you have to do in the classes, and if I don't do my homework in regular classes, then I might not do it in AP or Honors.

Okay

And they don't want to make it seem like I have to do it.

Okay. All right, and you say your friends would just talk to you about it. Um – you're considering taking one not next year but maybe your senior year – AP Psychology. And you'll think about it next year if a teacher or somebody talks to you about it. But you're not planning on it.

No

And, we talked about the counselor and teachers. No outside factors hindering you. Your friends would support you. Um – all right. Has the thought of GPA ever come up in ideas about –

Sometimes. Like I do think about my GPA a lot and how it would affect my GPA. But I'm not really sure about how having an Honors or AP would affect it.

Student Five: Paris

October 11, 2011

Buice: Have you even taken an Honors or AP course?

Paris: No

Not at all. Okay. So let me ask you this. What do you know about Honors and AP courses?

Um, what I know about it is that it is harder and more challenging

Okay

And it pushes, you know, your academics a little bit farther than a CP.

All right. Anything else?

No, that's it. That's all I've heard.

That's all you've heard. Okay. Now, have you ever considered taking an Honors or AP course?

I actually have, but I mean, I never really like pushed myself to.

All right.

It never really felt like a priority to me.

It wasn't a priority. Okay. If you were going to do that, what class would you have taken?

Lit definitely.

So that's your thing?

That's my thing.

And why is it not a priority do you think?

I just feel like if I can exceed in a CP class and just be average or mediocre in an Honors or AP class, then why should I take an Honors or AP course if I stand out more in a CP.

Okay, so you will stand out more in a CP. So, you told me why you chose not to, but let me ask you this: Have you, you said especially Lit, have any of your lit teachers ever come to you and said, "Hey, you should take an Honors course?"

Every year.

Every year?

Every year (laughing). I've always had A's in Lit, so that was a little like, every year they say that to me. "You should push yourself. You should push yourself." But I'm like, "Yeah, but I don't know. I guess it's like kind of out of my comfort zone a little bit, and I feel like, okay, I kinda do feel like I need to push myself a little bit more before I go to college, so I might, but I'm not sure yet.

You're not sure yet. So it's not the lack of teacher recommendation ...

No

That's keeping you from doing it. It's something in you.

It's me.

Okay.

(laughing) I'm my own worst enemy.

Okay, so let me ask you ... you are being your own worst enemy. See, you know it. So that's the thing. Well, what about your friends? Do you have friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Yes, I have had a friend who has taken Honors Lit last year. And she completely hated it. And she was like, "It's so hard. It's not what I expected." And I'm just like, well she wasn't really that good in Lit. Like she has always been a B or a C average type person, so it was like maybe you weren't cut out for it. Like she's more of a like, you know CP person.

Right

So, that's probably why she didn't like it, but not a lot of my friends take Honors or AP.

Okay

But not Lit, probably not Lit. Like math, I have probably had a lot like math. A few people I actually know are going to succeed in those classes. I guess I'm just a little scared.

You're just a little scared. So what do you think they would say to you if you came up and said, "Hey, I'm thinking about taking an Honors class next year?"

They'll actually congratulate me. A lot of friends want me to.

Okay.

They're like you should. You'll be good, but I don't know.

All right. Well, I'm glad to know that your friends are behind you and your teachers are behind you. What about counselors? Has a counselor ever mentioned it to you?

Actually, no. I don't really talk to my counselor that much. You know, I just talk to them about the SAT and the ACT, but not about like certain classes that they should recommend me to take. But, no.

Would it have made any difference to you if somebody had said, “Hey, look. You’re on this AP Potential list of having potential to succeed in an AP class.” Do you that would have given you that drive to go ahead or you still would have said no?

Definitely

It would have?

Definitely

All right, well, um, so my next question we have kind of talked about it, but let’s go back.

It says, “Would you consider taking an Honors or AP course?” And you said you would.

What would you consider taking next year?

So I might probably take like Lit Comp, the AP, yeah.

The AP Lit?

Yeah.

All right, we already talked about. . . Well, sometimes we skip ahead because we have already talked about my next question which was, “Would you have been more likely to take it if you knew you were recommended?” And you said you would. Do you think that you have any outside factors that would have an impact on your decision whether to take or not to take these courses? Like, do you work or have anything like that going on?

Involved in school activities?

Not. . . I haven’t worked yet, but I’m definitely gonna start looking into jobs just to have that, you know, extra, um. My parents just want me to get that outside, you know, how to manage money, how to make money, and stuff like that, so they are definitely pushing me to like get a job. I don’t need to; it’s just like – it’s good experience, so most likely I’ll get a job either soon or over the summer.

Okay, but probably nothing that will interfere with school?

No, not at all.

Okay, um, so what will your family think about the fact that you are thinking about an Honors or AP course?

They'll be excited. They want me to do so bad. They're like on your own time you push yourself, but they don't, you know, pressure me to do anything I'm not ready to do.

Okay

They want me to do it on my own time.

Okay. Well, this is not on here, but I have a question for you. Well, anything else you want to add first before I say anything else?

No, not at all.

Have you ever thought about the fact that there are not many African Americans who take AP and Honors courses?

Definitely

Do you have any considerations as to why that is?

From what I've seen, from people that go to this school, is that, um, African Americans most likely, they just. . . I don't think they're pushed enough. They, I don't think, are not taking [school] seriously, but I don't think they're pushed to actually broaden their knowledge of what they think, you know, what they should do, or what is the best for their future. It's just – I don't know.

You mean pushed by school, by family, by. . .

By both. By both.

By both?

Yep

Okay

I don't think they're being pushed enough. They, a lot of my friends, like they, you know a lot of my African American friends, they are very intelligent, but they don't show it, you know, through school for some reason. I don't know.

And you don't know why?

I don't get it. I think this is, high school is a stepping stone for your life. It shows what, you know, how successful you're gonna be. And I just don't think they grasp that yet.

Uh – huh

But sooner or later I know they are.

So do you think that there is something that we at the school can do to reach out?

Talk. Just, just, that's the best you can do. Contact parents or, you know, just talk to them, you know, in a comfortable setting. I think that, that will help a lot.

So do you think, though, that if we had – okay. You said talk. Like if we had a meeting, would they come? If we said, "If you are interested in AP, come," would they come?

Would kids in general come? Let's just put it that way.

Kids in general will come. African Americans probably, probably not. They're, you know, I don't think, you know, a lot of them would because they are, I mean, scared probably. Probably they're not comfortable, or you know, but a lot of kids will come.

Okay, but we need to make a point to reach out more to kids individually then? Is that what you're saying?

Right

Okay, um, more personal. Like you said, if somebody had reached out to you, you might have taken these courses, but yet a teacher did, and you said no.

Yeah, but I didn't think they were, you know, I didn't know if that was an idle remark or if it was for real. Like, I really think you should or if it was just like. . . It felt more general than it did, you know, like [her name] you make really good grades. You should really, you know, but...

All right, um. . . anything that you have noticed about the school as far as teachers or classes or anything that you think that would keep students from taking challenging classes?

No, not keep them from taking those classes. Not at all. Most likely, all the teachers are really, you know, understanding, and nice, and you know, really wanna, you know, interact with their students. I think it's more of peers.

Peers?

That influence them

Why do you say that?

You know, I think a lot of them like over exaggerate, saying, "Oh, it's so hard. The teacher doesn't care." Honestly, I don't think that's the case at all. I just think, I think sometimes your peers can be, you know, be demotivators. They don't want to see you succeed as a, as a class. Or, you know.

That's a very interesting point. I really like that - demotivators. So they don't want to see you succeed. Why do you think so?

I think it's more like competition.

Okay

I feel like it's all competition. Like, if you ever, like, what I've noticed in classrooms is like say one of my friends makes a better grade than I did on a test, they say, "Oh, look what I got." And I'll be like, "Congratulations." But they expect me to be, like, "Oh, I don't care." But I mean like, it's – I don't know. I think it's just more like they want to do better than you. Like they don't want to see you succeed or something of that nature.

So we have a lot of changing of attitudes to do?

Yes, a lot.

Okay, all right. That didn't take long at all. . . You mention parents. You know, should parents be contacted to say, "We need to push your child" or should we not do that.

What do you think about that one?

I think parents should be contacted. Honestly, if my parents were called, and like "Your child needs to take this AP class or this Honors class. I highly recommend it." My parents would be like, okay. You really need to take this. But since they were never called, they never really thought twice about it.

Do you think that Hope Scholarship plays into it some?

Yes, definitely, the . . . It's hard. It's really hard. It's a lot of pressure to, you know, keep your GPA up and keep your grades up. And Honors and AP, I realize really help, definitely, to get into colleges.

Okay. They help you get in, but they can hurt that GPA a little bit. It's a catch-22

Yep

It really is.

It is.

Student Six: Emory

October 11, 2011

***Buice:** You have already taken some Honors courses haven't you?*

Emory: Yes

Since you've been there, tell me first what you know about Honors and AP classes?

Um, I know that it... the courses that are – that you're able to be kind of like challenged mentally, and you also get like, depending on Honors or AP, you get five or ten points added to that class.

What Honors classes have you taken?

Um - my freshman year I took Honors Lit and Honors Advanced Math. And my sophomore year I took Honors Lit, um and there was another class I took in Honors. Then in my junior year, I took um Honors U.S. History and, um – I don't know. I took Honors classes all throughout my three years of high school.

And then when you go to be a senior, you went "No!"

(Laughing) Yes

Why?

Because when, well mainly because my sophomore year I struggled with taking Honors Lit. I barely passed it, so I just decided I wasn't going to take it again my junior year. It was just hurting me academically as far as my GPA because I didn't want to be able to get to a certain place and then like try to move forward, and I can't because of my GPA. And I want to go to a certain college, so it was

basically the main thing was the GPA and the extra stress that it puts on me as far as having to be at work, and it's just too much.

Just too much. Okay, then why did you decide to. . . Well, Lit was too much, but history, though –

Yea, I took history though because my sophomore year I was in Mrs. R_____’s class and she - that was the other class I was in. I was in the Honors class – whatever ...

World History

Yea, World History, and she suggested that I go ahead and take eleventh grade Honors because I was basically making an A throughout the whole year. So I was okay, well, it can't hurt to take it, but I got in there, and I regretted my whole decision because basically throughout that whole year I was basically on the borderline or almost below – I was C but like almost a B, and that's not usually my thing – being a B and C category, so that's why I regretted it, but I mean it was a challenge, and I like a challenge, so.

Okay. You like a challenge. So this year, I think you have already answered this, but you decided not to because of your GPA, getting ready for college, and stuff.

Yea

Okay, let me ask you this. You said that Mrs. R_____ recommended you.

Yes

Has any other teacher recommended that you take Honors course?

Um, my math teacher. I took - I had him for my ninth and tenth grade year, and he recommended me for that, and then my eleventh grade year, he recommended

me for that also, but I ended up dropping out my first week of Pre Calculus – Honor 3 I guess you would call it. Uh, Mr. I_____ recommended me for Advanced Comp, but he also recognized that I didn't like to write, and I'm not a writer, so I ended up not taking that class. So, it's Mr. I_____, and Mr. J_____ who recommended me to take Honors classes.

Okay, so it hasn't been a lack of teacher referral then?

Un-uh (no)

Okay, what about counselors then? Has any counselor ever talked to you about it?

Um, my counselor - no, not really. I mean, they saw that like I had potential, but they never really said like, "Hey, you should take this course." Um, they just saw I had potential, and they pretty much left the choice up in my hands.

What about friends? Do you have a lot of friends who take Honors or AP courses?

No.

No?

No (laughing). I guess I'm like the nerd or the smart one out of my friends.

Okay.

But I like try to get them to take Honors courses, but they – their main worry was like, "I'm not smart enough," or "They move too fast." Or "It's gonna hurt my grades," or "I don't have enough time." So I've tried to get them to take it, but yea, they don't want to take it.

So when you said, "I'm not going to take them any more," did they say anything about it?

They're like, "Oh, well, now you finally realize." It's just like hurting my GPA academically, and it's a lot of stress. And I wanted to make sure that like in my first three years of high school I did really, really good. I worked really hard so that way I got to my senior year, I could at least just relax and worry about my Senior Project for the remainder of the year, so that's why I decided not to take, um, Honors Advanced Comp because I don't like writing, and it's too much stress, and I knew I was going to have a job, and I was going through things at home, so it was just going to be too much.

Just too much.

Yea, so that's why.

All right. So you have kind of touched on this a little bit because, um, obviously I can't ask about next year. I'll just mark that one out. What I am going to ask you is about college in a minute. But outside factors you kind of touched on. You have a job?

Um-hum

So that was going to take time, you thought.

Yea, um – well, at the beginning of the year, I had three jobs.

Oh, wow!

So, I couldn't – well, I wanted to take Honors classes – well, I knew last year – I really do want to take Honors classes, but at the same time I'm going to be having jobs, and I don't want to not be able to give my full focus to an Honors class, so I was like I really can't take Honors classes because I need money. And a lot of things were going on. So like, yeah that was my focus for not putting myself in an Honors class because I knew A) I was going to be struggling in it and still pass

the class or either B) I was just going to fail, and I don't want to. I'm just like the kind of person where I want to pass the class and like to the best as I can, so um yea, the outside factors mainly contributed a lot to me not taking Honors courses outside of GPA. Yeah.

All right. What about your family? What did your family think about your decision?

Um, well... they basically. Well, my mom, she likes to see me challenge myself, but it's like they trust me enough to know that I'm going to make decisions that are smart enough so I can know that I can only bear so much. So since my freshman, sophomore, and junior years I took Honors classes, and I said, like "Hey, Mom, I can't really take Honors classes any more because they are stressing on me," and she knew that, what, hey, if my daughter says that, then it must be true because I took it all three years.

Right

And I kind of went through it, but I just couldn't take it any more.

Okay. That makes sense. All right. Um, a lot of these are not going to apply to you.

Okay, tell me about next year. Where do you plan to go to college next year?

Um. Well, first I wanted to go to Emory, and then that changed. So now I want to go to Georgia Highlands to get Associate's in Nursing. And then hopefully transfer into KSU and get my BSN instead of just an RN. Get my BSN and then try to be a neonatal nurse.

Okay. All right. So, do you think that not taking AP or Honors courses in going to hinder you or help you in any way in reaching your college goals?

Well, I do wish now – because at first I was just going to be a cosmetologist, so it really didn't matter. Just go to a cosmetology school. And then it changed, so now I regret that I didn't take Honors classes this year because it's just - it would have prepared me for moving into college, but at the same time, like I don't regret it because I am able to focus on doing what I need to do, and I can do what I need to do to get good grades so when they do end up looking at my transcript, they can see that I at least tried hard up until this time, and I am still doing good even though I dropped out of those classes.

Right, and Georgia Highlands, they will look for AP, but it's not like at Emory because they would really look for AP classes there, so...

Yeah

That makes a difference as to where you are going to go to school too. So that is awesome. That will be great. Um, is there anything here that the school might do to discourage students or encourage students, either one, to take Honors or AP courses?

Um, it's not necessarily the school; it's the teachers. They, um, basically they give their input about how they feel about you as a student, as to whether you should do good in this class and they really recommend you take it, or you will not do good in this class and don't take. Um, a lot of teachers do focus on you taking classes that are going to challenge you academically, so that's basically what I see at [this school]. They are really, really pressuring you to be challenged academically, so that's especially with the students here. We have a lot of smart students here, so, and all of them are being in all of these AP classes or Honors classes, so that's the main thing I think here at [this school]. It's a main focus on

being challenged academically so that way when we move on to the next level, we will be prepared.

So you don't see a discouragement? You see encouragement more than discouragement?

Yeah, I see encouragement.

Good.

Yeah.

Well, in those Honors courses, were you in the minority as far as being an African American in there?

Um, yeah. I was.

So do you think that there is anything that we can do to reach out to other groups, to reach out to get more African Americans, Hispanics, or other groups involved?

I guess I think that like more information, more behind the scenes things about Honors and AP classes should be given because if you was to talk to one of my friends who hasn't been in AP or any Honors classes for the whole high school career, their mindset is always that oh it is too hard; I can't do it. And that's what I thought, especially coming out of middle school. Oh, it's too hard. I can't be in any Honors classes. But I went ahead and did it anyway just to see if I could do it, so I think it should be background – here it is. This is what we do versus just a bare description when we are signing up for our classes. And I think that they don't really know much about it, and they are afraid by what they don't know.

Ok. Afraid of what they don't know. I agree with that. Do you think that there is anything that you could suggest that we do to get that information out to everyone? How would you suggest we do that?

Ummmm... I mean, I think just like we do registration or like we do the upcoming classes when we do registration. I think that like a week or two before we do that, like when we do Warrior Wednesday, we start giving PowerPoints about these different classes and what's done because if we can give PowerPoints about everything else, then I think we should be able to give PowerPoints about the classes we offer versus just the bare minimum because the only thing they see about these classes, about these classes they are going to sign up for next year, are the descriptions on the paper. They don't really see anything else, so they don't really know what's entitled.

That's a good idea with homeroom. Someone suggested maybe a meeting, but I don't know if people will come to a meeting.

Yeah, like, since like [homeroom] is mandatory, that's like the only way they'll be able to hear about it versus just like I said just reading on a paper because when I read about Advanced Comp, I was like, "Oh, no. I really do not like writing." But then people that I thought would never be in Advanced Comp are in Advanced Comp and say that it's not that hard, so I regret not taking it. But that was basically my main thing, and I know it's like my friends' main thing, like, well, we don't know much about it, so why should we take it because I just heard that it is hard. So I think homeroom would be a good time to get people out there and say, "Hey, this is what we're offering, and this may not be for you, but at least sit down and listen to it" because they have to listen to it anyway because it's mandatory.

Right.

So, I think that would be a good thing to do or try.

That's a really good idea. Is there anything else that you might want to say that we need to do or that we are doing well? Just anything else that you want to add? This is your chance to add anything you want to add.

Um . . . I mean, I think this school is pretty good as a whole. Um, I just think that. . . I guess – I don't know. I like this school! I mean, academics are good. I think the stress to graduate and do things you're supposed to is good also. And whatever the school can do to help you, to graduate or to get what you need, I see that here also. So, um, I think that you, if a kid does not graduate on time or is failing classes, I think that that is personally their own fault. Because we have tutoring; we have counselors; we have people here to help you. So I just think that this school, this school as a whole, it's good. I don't have a problem with it.

Student Seven: Shane

October 13, 2011

Buice: What Honors courses have you taken?

Shane: I took Honors World History last year, Honors Spanish 2

Okay, and why did you take those two?

Um, it was actually a good placement for me. I did good the past year, so I thought I could go up into that level.

Then why are you not taking any more?

Well, after last year, uh, the work load got really hard. I didn't expect it to get as bad as it did, and I ended up getting behind on some stuff, so, yeah.

Okay, well tell me what you know about Honors and AP just in general.

I know they usually count more. Um, colleges usually look at them more whenever you turn in your transcript.

Okay

And that's all I really know.

That's all you really know. Okay. And you know they have a harder work load from your own experience.

Yeah

Um, is there any other reason that you chose not to continue on?

No, not really.

Alright, well let me ask you this. Did your teacher talk to you and say you should stay in here?

No

No. Has a teacher ever come to you and said, "You know, I really think you need to be in an Honors course?"

No

Has a counselor ever come to you and said that you need to be in an Honors course?

No

So no one has ever mentioned it to you at all?

No

So on your own, you just took a couple on your own?

Yeah

And then decided that it's not your thing.

Yeah (laughing)

Alright, um, do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP classes?

I have a lot of friends.

All right. What do they say about Honors and AP?

They say it's the same. A lot of work but they're up for it.

So if you went to them and said, "Hey, I want to take one next year," what would they say to you, do you think?

Just stay with it.

Stay with it. They wouldn't discourage you?

No, no not really.

Not really. All right, what you do think would happen if you went home to your mom and said, "Hey, Mom, I want to take Honors and AP next year." What would your mom say?

She would love it.

She would love it?

She would love it. She would love it.

Why would she love it so?

She wants me to succeed so much.

Uh-huh

She wants me to get into like the best college I can.

And where do you want to go to college?

Right now I am thinking somewhere in Tennessee. Close enough to home where

I can drive home but not too far away.

All right. Just be careful. I don't know anything about Tennessee schools, but I know that some schools around here like Georgia and Georgia Tech won't even look at you if you don't take Honors and AP courses. So if you are going to some of those schools, be careful and look at your transcripts and decide if you want to take another one next year. But if it is too much, then it is too much. Now you said that you knew you could do it, right, in the beginning of our talk?

Yeah.

Were your grades good in those classes?

They were a lot lower than the years before.

In all of your classes? Did they hurt all of your classes because you did so much in those classes? Or was it just in those classes?

It was really just those – those classes.

So even with the points, you thought that it wasn't worth it.

Yeah

If you are going to Tennessee next year, are you worried about HOPE Scholarship?

Yes. Yes, much worried.

Yes, so is that another reason why?

Yes

So AP kills your HOPE I guess.

Yeah

Alright, um, what about in your community or anybody else out there? Is there anybody you find who discourages you from taking Honors or AP courses?

No

No

No, not anybody in my immediate circle.

Okay, do you hear talk around school of anybody putting down anyone else because they are taking Honors or AP courses?

No

No, so around here it is pretty acceptable. You can do that.

Yes

Um, let me ask you this. If you decided next year that you wanted to take an Honors or AP course again, would you have any outside factors that would keep you from doing that? Like a job or . . .

No, I am completely unemployed and broke. (Laughing)

(Laughing) Unemployed and broke. All right. And so what about anything else like commitments to anything else that would keep you . . .

Other than basketball, none.

All right, um, I just want you to . . . well, let me ask you this. When you were sitting in that Honors class, and you looked around you, what did you notice about the other students sitting around you? Anything in particular?

In my Spanish class, there were a lot of sophomores.

Sophomores?

Well, freshmen last year, sophomores this year.

Okay, so a lot of freshmen in there. All right, did you notice anything else?

I was usually the only Black person in there.

That was my question.

Yeah

You were the only Black person?

Yeah

What do you think about that? Why do you think we have so few Black people taking Honors and AP courses?

It's usually discouraged.

Okay, it is discouraged. I have read about that. Tell me what you think.

Um, well, we usually are turned more into sports, and academics . . .well, not much into academics.

Okay

Usually we just try to get by with the athletic abilities that we are given, and most of us don't even try to do well in school. Or we don't care enough to do well in school.

Are you - you say your mom is encouraging you?

Yes. Yes.

But in the community? Is it the community or the school where you see that discouragement, or both?

It's more of the community.

Do you think that we can do more here at the school to encourage people or maybe to encourage people in your community about it? Is there something that we can do to get more kids involved?

Actually, yeah, a lot of kids at school, they're more prone to do stuff if the

teachers here will do it because people outside, they tend to put us down, so. . .

Okay, I don't think I will offend you if I say this. I read an article that said that sometimes if African American students take these AP courses with all of the White kids, they are called "acting White." Have you heard that phrase around here?

Yeah

So you have heard that?

Yes

Is it more in the community or more in the school that you have heard that?

Yeah, the community.

The community?

Yeah, well the people who are around [this city], well the African American people.

So you hear that term there?

Yeah

What does that mean to you when you hear that?

It is really downgrading because you are just as African American as they are.

Right

And I am doing more with myself than they are doing with themselves.

And, um, so have you ever thought about taking the courses just to fight that stereotype or . . .

Yeah, sometimes.

Sometimes?

Yeah

I wanted to bring it up because the reason why I am asking this is that I sit around my Honors and AP classes, and I have very few African American or Hispanic students. It's mostly White, and a lot of White girls.

Uh-huh, yeah.

So I am trying to find out what we can do to bring more people in. So what could, can you think of anything that I could do or the school could do that would bring in them in? You said that if they were encouraged by teachers more, that would be it.

Yeah

How can we do that?

Just like, cause I know that some people have a lot of friends; ask them to do it with a friend. Ask a friend if they are up to it. They might be able to do it with a friend.

So if some of you guys who have the ability to do that, would you be willing to go out and speak to others or would that put you at a place where you don't want to get involved in?

No, I would really rather not.

You wouldn't want to get involved in it? So It is something that we are going to fight here within the school . . .

Yes

. . .So that we can break that stereotype and then you will feel comfortable doing it. You act like you feel uncomfortable with that whole set-up.

Yeah

So you have probably heard this a lot then.

Yeah

Okay, so community stereotypes may keep some kids from taking it. Is that what you are saying?

Yes

Okay, but you don't think the school. Do we as a school do anything to keep African American kids from taking Honors and AP classes?

No, not that I know of.

So you don't see teachers not doing something because somebody is African American or Hispanic? You see that as okay?

Yeah

It's community more?

Yeah.

Um, so go out, get a friend to take it with you, see what it's like. Anything else you can think of that we can do?

No, no more than that cause some people, it just goes in one ear and out the other.

Okay, so if a teacher comes to you and says, "You know what, your name is on this list. You really have potential to do well in this class." Will you be more apt to take it?

Yes, I would.

So if we went out to all of these kids who are on this list and said, "Your name is on this list. Now it doesn't mean that you are automatically going to get a good grade. It means that you are going to have to work hard." Do you think more kids in general would take the class?

Yes, I think they will.

So maybe getting information out to everybody?

Yes

Would it mean more coming to you from a counselor or from a teacher?

From a teacher. From a teacher because you know more about the teacher. You have a class with the teacher.

Okay

Counselors seem really distant because you don't ever see them.

Okay, all right. Good. Now what if it came from a teacher you didn't know. Like, what if I came around with the list. Does it need to be that it's somebody you know?

Yeah, somebody I know. Yeah, I think it would be better coming from a teacher that you are more familiar with.

Okay, but nobody has ever said that to you?

No

Because we had this list, and we passed it out last year, and when we get through with this, I will look and see what you qualified in for last year. Um, all right, let me go back

over this because some of these questions are for folks who have never taken any before, so let me look at them. You told me what you know about Honors and AP. You told me you took two, but it just didn't work, and your grades kind of dropped. Um, nobody as mentioned it to you, counselor or teachers. Friends here at school might not say anything, but in the community they say something.

Yeah.

You would be more likely to take it if you were told you were on the list.

Yes

No outside factors. You're just broke

Yeah (laughing)

And that's it. No job. Friends, if you decided to take it, wouldn't give you a hard time you don't think, or would they?

No, they wouldn't

Your friends, your circle wouldn't.

Yeah

Uh, your family would be okay with it.

Yes.

Okay, so here's the thing. Would you like to go back and take an Honors or AP course next year?

Right now, no.

Right now, no. Okay. Is it anything besides work load?

No, it's just work load. I would rather have a good grade in a regular class than a bad grade in a good class.

Student Eight: Anthony

October 13, 2011

Buice: Have you ever taken an AP or Honors course before?

Anthony: Honors

Yes, Honors. And what Honors course did you take?

I think I had all advanced classes in seventh grade. . . and in sixth grade.

Honors in sixth and seventh. Um, anything here at the high school?

No

No, so just in sixth and seventh grade. Were you in the gifted program or were you in the AIM program? Did you go to C_____ County schools?

Yeah

So you were in the AIM program?

No

Not AIM, but you were in advanced classes. Okay. Well, tell me what you know about Honors and AP courses here at [this school].

That they do more advanced and challenging materials.

All right, more advanced and challenging. What else?

(No answer)

Have you heard anything else about them?

Um, they read some like different books in literature than the regular classes do.

Okay. All right. Anything else?

I think that some of them study stuff, like this is from the next grade because they get the material from this grade.

Okay, so they study ahead a little bit. All right, well let me ask you this. Have you ever considered taking an Honors course or an AP course here?

I don't know if I ever did have the decision. I don't know.

You just never thought about it?

No

Okay. Um, has a teacher here ever talked to you about taking an Honors or AP course?

Um, I don't think, so but I think a couple of teachers said I could, that I should be in Honors classes.

But they haven't talked to you in particular about it. They just said you probably should.

Okay, what about a counselor? Has a counselor ever talked to you about your courses?

I don't think that I have talked to a counselor here.

You have never talked to one here? Okay. When you have your yearly meeting with them, have you talked to them?

What is a yearly meeting?

You have a meeting every year with your counselor.

I didn't.

You have never had one?

No

Okay. Um, do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Yeah

And what do they say about the courses? Anything else that you haven't said already?

No

No. Um, do you think that you would like to take an Honors or AP course?

Maybe

Maybe. What course?

Um, I would probably like math or literature.

Okay. Let me ask you this. If I came to you and said, "Hey, you're on this list that you have potential to do well in an Honors or AP course," would you be more apt to take it if someone told you that?

Probably

Why?

Because, um, I, like, I guess the prospect of that is more, like, I don't know the word for it, motivating, I guess.

The prospect is motivating. All right. Um, if you decided to take this Honors Lit course next year, or the Honors math course next year, are there any outside factors at home, in the community, or anywhere that would keep you from taking it?

Not necessarily anything mandatory, if so...

Okay, there is a lot of extra work involved in an Honors or AP course. Would you have the time to do that work or the motivation to do that work?

Probably

Probably. Okay. What do you think your friends would say if you went to them and said, "Hey, I'm going to take an Honors course next year?"

I don't know.

You don't know. Okay. And what about your family?

I don't know. I guess they would just say that it would look good on my college application and like motivate me to do it.

Student 9: Karina

October 14, 2011

Buice: What do you know about Honors or AP courses?

Karina: Well, I know that they're hard.

Okay

And they are not like the normal classes if they are Honors or AP. And only like the students who know a lot of the subjects are taking Honors classes.

Okay. Is there anything else that you know?

No

All right. Well, let me ask you this? Have you ever considered taking an Honors or AP course?

No

No?

No

Do you have a subject that you think you are stronger in than other subjects?

Um, English

In English?

Yeah.

But you just never considered taking one?

No

All right. Has a teacher ever talked to you about your grades and that maybe you would do well in a certain class?

Ah, yes. Mrs. C_____.

Mrs. C_____? And did she recommend though that you take any Honors courses?

Um, not really

Not really. Okay. What about when you met with the counselor? Has the counselor ever said anything to you about taking an Honors course?

No

No. Okay, so neither one of them. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Yes.

Yes. And what do they say about the courses?

They're hard.

They're hard. Okay. Anything else?

That it is just stressful sometimes. Like, it's really hard for them.

Okay.

It's not like normal classes.

Okay. All right. Based on what they've said, do you think that you would ever be interested in taking an Honors class?

No

No. Why not?

Because, well right now, I think it would be very hard for me to do the work in all those classes and everything. So I just don't want the stress of taking the harder classes.

Okay. You don't want all that stress.

Yes.

All right. You said you have some friends who had taken them, though. What do you think your friends would say if you said, "Hey, I'm thinking about it?" What do you think they would tell you?

Um, well, some of them will say that it will be a great idea, but some will say that it's not cause it's hard. I've seen them doing homework, and sometimes they don't understand it cause the teacher didn't explain it well, or they just went too fast.

Okay. So it would kind of be mixed as to whether they would tell you to take it or not.

Yes.

What about your family? What if you went home and told your family that you wanted to take an Honors course?

Well, I think they would be okay with the idea. But still, my mom would say to think about it because it will be more stress and everything.

So you think more about the stress and the work load more than anything else?

Yes

Okay. What do you think if somebody came to you and said, "Your name is on this list that says that you could do well if you took one of these classes?" Would you be more apt to take it if you were told that your name was on the list?

No

No. It wouldn't impact you at all?

No

And it is still because of what reason?

Um, just the reason that it's hard, and it's too much stress and homework. And everything is harder.

Okay. Um, do you think that there are outside factors like work or other things that keep kids from taking Honors or AP courses?

(Student did not understand the question.)

Like they have to work and have a job, so they couldn't do the homework. Have you heard them say that there are other things besides just being hard? Have you heard anything else like that?

Not really

Not really. All right. Have you heard them say that people might put them down and make fun of them if they are taking the smart classes?

Well, no.

No.

Like they say that only the smart kids take Honors classes, but it is hard for them. But nobody makes fun of them?

No

Not in school or out in the community anywhere?

Well, they call them nerds, but you know, it's something that everybody will say about them. But it is something that like somehow they have to feel special for because they're in like an Honors class, and some kids will make it.

But being special takes the place of being a nerd?

Yes (laughs)

Yes. All right. You have never been in an Honors class you said, but we don't have a lot of people from Hispanic backgrounds in our Honors classes. Do you think that there is any reason why we don't in particular?

Well, it might be because they know that it's hard, and knowing that like sometimes they want to learn in the language that is more difficult. But in an Honors class, it will be more hard to understand the main things that they will learn.

Okay

And that might be why.

What about an Honors Spanish class?

No

So if you were told that you could qualify for an Honors Spanish class, for you it's not the subject matter, it's the work load?

Yes

Okay. All right. So that wouldn't make any difference at all.

No

All right. Well, I am just trying to figure out why we have so few Hispanic or African American students in our Honors and AP classes. That is part of what I am asking. And so I just wondered if you had heard anything out there or people saying anything in particular about why they are not.

Well, like last year, no two years ago, I took Math 3, and they said they would choose the ones for the Honors classes, and one of my friends, she got to go. And she said that it was really hard, so the second semester she quit because it was like

too much stress, and she graduated already, but still she said that it might be hard to pass the classes and then not graduate on time, so she quit.

So graduating on time is more important than taking those harder classes?

Yes

Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to tell me about

Honors or AP or what we do around the school here about it? Or anything that you want to add about Honors or AP courses?

No really. Just what I know. I know that it's hard and like not all students can make it cause sometimes they think that they can, but they don't. Like my friend I just told you about. She did it for a semester, but then she quit.

Buice: Okay. Let me ask you this. Have you ever taken an Honors course here?

Michaela: No, I haven't.

No, you have not. Okay. All right, so what do you know about Honors and AP courses?

I know that like they, um, I know that they like help you out with your college credits and stuff like that so when you go, um, when you actually go to college, you don't have to retake those courses.

Okay. Do you know anything else about them?

That's about it.

That's it. All right. Well, that's good. So you said that you have not taken one, but have you ever considered taking an Honors course?

I mean, I have thought about it, but then like I don't know if I would fail it or something like that. I'm just like scared I would lose that credit because of me failing the class.

What subject did you think about it in?

Probably lit.

Okay. All right.

Um, either that or Spanish, or something like that cause I'm really good in Spanish cause I speak it fluently.

Okay. And what about Spanish? You are worried you will fail it, but you speak it fluently.

No, but like other, like other courses, like maybe science or something like that.

If I were to take science, like Honors science or something like that, I would be afraid that I would like lose that credit because of me failing it.

What Spanish are you in right now?

I'm in Spanish One. I didn't take it last year.

Okay. And you're just a sophomore?

Yes

Okay. So you still have time to maybe take an AP Spanish eventually.

Yeah

Okay. Good. All right. Um, so you said. . . My next question is why you chose not to take it, but you answered it in there that you're just concerned about grades. But Spanish, you might consider it; you are saying maybe.

Yeah. Like, I am going to think about doing it next year.

Okay. Are you in Honors? You're not in Honors Spanish this year are you?

No.

All right. Let me ask you this. Has a teacher ever talked to you or did a teacher talk to you last year, because you've just been here in ninth grade, um, or did a teacher talk to you at middle school about taking Honors courses?

No. No teachers have really brought it up to me.

Okay. What about when you met with your counselor last year? Has your counselor ever mentioned it to you?

No

No. So no mentioned it at all. Well, let me ask you this. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

I actually have a lot of friends who are taking Honors and AP courses. Um, actually one of my friends is taking all Honors and like that. I just don't see how, like, I would be able to do that compared to what, to like how they do it.

Why is that?

Like, they have to like study constantly and stuff like that and be prepared for the material, like the material in that class. Like in my classes, I only have to study for like maybe about an hour, and I'm done.

Okay. So what do your friends who take them say about the Honors and AP classes?

They say for them that it's easy cause like they have been taking them like since freshman year.

Okay

But they say like that as you take more and more of them, it just gets easier cause you're like used to it.

Okay. Um, so you are saying that you are thinking about taking an Honors course maybe in Spanish next year?

Yeah

Is there anything else you would consider maybe taking a course in next year?

Probably lit or something

Okay, but at this point, you are just kind of wavering on it?

Yes

If someone came to you and said, "Here's this list, and this list says that you have potential to take this AP course and do really well in it," would that influence you more to take the course or not?

Yeah, it would actually help me out like a lot more, just knowing that someone actually thinks that I can probably do it and I would be really good in it.

Okay. Would it have more impact that you are on this list coming from your teacher or your counselor? Or would it make any difference?

It probably wouldn't make any difference. I mean, it would help a little bit more if it came like directly from a teacher or a counselor.

Okay, but just the fact that you know that you could do well would help?

Yes

All right. Um, if you decide to take an Honors course, because you said that there's a lot of work that goes along with it, do you have any outside factors outside of school that would keep you from taking an Honors course?

Not really.

No jobs?

No

Outside of school, do you ever hear anyone in the community talking about Honors or AP courses out there in the community anywhere?

Um, well this senior that lives like three houses down from me; he's taking all AP. So he's talking about how like the hours of homework he has and stuff like that. And he's always so tired.

So that's what's scaring you a little bit?

Yeah, that's what scaring me is all that work.

Okay, so there you go. Um, so those friends you have who are taking Honors and AP courses, like if you came in tomorrow and said, "Guess what! I'm going to take an AP course next year." How would they react?

They would probably, like, influence me to take, like, to take at least two maybe classes just so I could have those credits ready for college.

Okay.

So I wouldn't have to take them then.

Okay. And, then, what do you think your family would say if you came in and said that you wanted to do it?

My family would support me and like the decision I made considering like no one in my family has really taken any AP classes before.

Okay

And so they would probably help me out in it if I needed any help.

Okay. So you said you speak Spanish.

Yeah

So do you have an Hispanic background?

Yes, I do.

Okay. Have you noticed that a lot of our Honors classes do not have a lot of Hispanic students in the Honors classes?

I haven't noticed that.

Okay. Well, we don't have. So can you think of any factors that may be causing that here at the school, or in the community, or anywhere?

It's like probably like the fact that other Hispanic students, like their parents probably haven't taken any AP courses, so they think that they don't have to take them if their parents didn't.

Okay, so you think it might be more factors outside?

Yeah.

Is there anything in the school that you think would keep them from taking it?

Probably their friends thinking like, oh, why are you taking that, or something like that. Maybe their friends, maybe they think their friends would make fun of them for taking the classes like that.

Okay. But your friends wouldn't do that?

No

No, but you are saying that there is a possibility that that could happen here?

Yeah

Um, why do you think they would make fun of them for taking these courses?

Just cause like the fact that maybe it's like smarter kids that usually take the class, and they don't want to be like made fun of for being smarter, like for being smarter than they are.

Okay, so it's the smartness of it. It has nothing to do with the fact there might be a lot of White kids in the class versus Hispanic or. . .

No

So it just the making fun for being smart.

Yeah.

.

Student Eleven: Charles

October 21, 2011

Buice: Have you ever taken any Honors or AP courses?

Charles: Uh, only in my freshman year, but I dropped out after the first semester.

So first semester and that was it. What did you take?

Um, I took Honors math, and I kind of went back to regular math.

Okay, so Honors math first semester. So tell me what you know about Honors and AP courses.

Well, I know that they're for, uh, more advanced. They're more advanced.

Okay

And, uh, which is a more challenging subject for students. And I have heard that they're pretty hard, but some people say that they are pretty easy. So I think it just depends on the person who is taking it.

Right. Okay. Anything else you've heard about them?

I've heard about them that they're good. Like they're good for colleges to look at.

Okay. All those things you've heard.

Yes

All right. Uh, my next question was, "Have you ever considered taking one?" But after you dropped out from math, have you ever thought about going back in to another one?

Yeah, I was thinking about going back into one next year cause I'm taking physics this year.

Okay

I might want to AP Chemistry or AP Physics.

Why did you choose science or AP Chemistry?

AP Chemistry? Well, they told me to choose Environmental because it is like my senior year. They told me to choose Environmental because it is kind of like the easy class, but I am just trying to see for like, uh, for an AP Chemistry or AP Physics so I can actually learn more heading toward college.

Okay

And so I will have more options about what I am going to choose for my career.

Very good advice you got there. Whoever said that to you gave you some good advice there. All right. Has a teacher ever talked to or suggested that you take an AP or Honors course?

Ah, yeah. One of my math teachers and one of my science teachers. Uh, this year it was my science teacher. She told me to take either AP Chemistry or AP Physics. Last year they told me to take advanced math for this year.

But you chose not to?

I did, but it is just called Advanced Math – not Honors.

All right. What about counselors? Has a counselor ever talked to you about taking any kind of Honors classes?

No, not really. I'm kind of like, uh, I haven't really talked to my counselor since I have been in Cherokee. So it's pretty much whenever I need to, I want to, but sometimes I can't find the time to.

Okay,

So it has to be something like really important, like about my grades or stuff, or my transcript and all of that. If I get something wrong on my transcript, maybe I'll go to the counselor or something.

Okay, but no chances to just to get to sit down and talk to them about anything?

No, not really. It's kind of like I try and base my decisions on what I learn.

Okay. That's fine. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Yeah, I have a pretty big, a bunch of friends that have taken Honors or AP.

So what do they say when they are talking about these courses?

When they are talking about these courses? Uh, it's pretty much like when we're talking. If I take regular, and they take Honors. It's pretty much like we're on different. . . Like when we get an assignment, our assignment is pretty much like simple and straight to the point. And they have to get to exact details, like homework and stuff. They have to write down more. We only have to answer the questions, but they have to make up the questions and answer them. And it's pretty much like they say – it's advanced. Like they, uh, let's say you have a project or something, they have to do more research than us.

Okay. So you've got a pretty good idea about them already?

Yeah.

Good! Um, so you said you would like to take one next year. I've got that down already.

So let me ask you this. Would you have been more apt to have taken an Honors or AP course if somebody told you that you were recommended to take it?

Uh, probably yeah.

Probably yeah?

Because if I got recommended, that means that they know I'm capable of taking that class.

Okay.

It's just that I have to work hard. That's probably why I would take it cause they know I could take it.

Okay. Would it matter if it came from a teacher or a counselor?

Uh, it would probably be the same, but it would probably better for a teacher because they actually know our way of working, more than the counselor. They like grade our tests and see our work method and all that stuff.

Okay. One more thing or scenario. If you were told that your name is on this list of AP potential. It didn't come from a teacher. It didn't come from a counselor. It came from somebody who said, "Your name is on this list. You have the potential of doing well in this class." Would that impact you in any way?

Depending in what class it would be.

Okay.

If it's in an area where I don't do so good, then I'll probably be like, they are mistaken or something. But if it is in a class I achieve in, then I would probably go ahead and take it because I know I am probably capable of doing it.

Okay. Good answer. It makes sense to say that. All right. Do you have anything outside of school that if you took an Honors or AP class, it would keep you from doing the work load or would influence you not to take a class?

Well, right now, no. But, uh, I don't work or anything. I just go home and, like, uh, and play soccer. But like during when, like the only time it would affect me is

during soccer season here. That's the only time, but I would probably have to fix the schedule and do my homework so I can like actually achieve passing the class.

Okay. All right. If you went out today and told your friends, "Hey, I'm going to take this Honors course next year. I'm going to take AP Physics or Chemistry," or whatever you're thinking about. How would your friends react to that?

Um, well, we usually talk about our classes a lot, and I have mentioned that to a couple of my friends, and they're like, that's good. Some of my senior friends that, uh, are going to graduate this year, they are like, that's good because heading in toward college it's better to start your senior year with something that's got a little bit harder so once you get into college, it's not that hard. So they are saying that it's a good idea. And like going to your senior year and doing something hard instead of just laying back because it's your senior year and trying to do something easy.

Okay. Good advice

Yeah.

What would your family say?

My family? Uh, they would probably be happy. They would probably be like, I don't know. Cause throughout the years when I have been in school, since I got into like high school, I was an all straight A student, but then I was A-B, A-B, and now this year I only need, uh, I only need one more grade to be an all A student again. So they would probably be like I'm making an effort to get better and get better, and they'll probably, like they support me on everything, but maybe that's

just so I can back them up and say thank you that I, that I thank them for supporting me in school and in anything else.

Good. I like that answer. Well, let me ask you this. When we talk about your friends who are in AP and Honors courses, are they Hispanic, White, African American?

Um, well, they're not necessarily ...they're all. I have Hispanic friends that are in AP Honors. I have White friends, and I have African American friends that are in AP classes. I don't know. It's just depends on how they work out their school and stuff and how they get their schedule. Which is kind of like the same. It doesn't really matter like what race they are.

Okay, good. Because that was my next question. Sometimes our classes here, our Honors and AP, have more White students than we do Hispanic students or African American students.

Uh-huh

Have you seen anything here at the school that you think would cause that to happen?

Uh, it would probably be, uh, like peer pressure, or friends and stuff. Like, let's say, um, with Hispanics and stuff, there's a lot of like – it starts when they come from elementary and like middle school and stuff. They are coming like bad and bad; they're not going to look forward to make better progress and try and get a harder class.

Okay

They, uh, sometimes, it's like one. There only has to be one in a certain group to mess up the whole group. Cause if there is like one that's a troublemaker, and you start hanging out with that person. And like it happens in all the races. I

know what my parents look for because they have been working hard for me to get a great education, so if I just mess up half way, that wouldn't be good for them.

So you don't think it's the school doing anything.

No, not really.

You think it's more peer pressure?

Yeah. It's more about what the kids, like a kid works hard and depends on no matter what race it is, if they work hard, then they should take those classes. But it's like not taking, I think, uh, like, uh. You said that there was like more White people in those types of classes?

Uh-huh

I think it's because parents are more involved and with their kids because sometimes, like I see for example, a bunch of situations where like Hispanic kids, and like they go home with their bad grades and stuff, and they don't get anything said to them. And I think that's a problem sometimes with the parents not getting onto their kids about their grades.

Do you think that there is anything that we can do at the school then to reach out to the community, to let them know the importance, or do you think that's just something that would not do any good?

Well, I think y'all do enough to make, uh, the kids responsible for like their grades and stuff. Cause y'all notify their parents when they get a bad grade or anything. Y'all have that, uh, student, teacher, parent thing online where, uh,

parents can go ahead and look at their grades. And I think it just depends on what the parents and the students do to get to a certain level and like those classes.

Okay. So it parents' background. It doesn't matter what race you are. It's just parents and student communication?

Uh-huh

Student Twelve: Bree

October 25, 2011

Buice: My first question to you is – Have you taken Honors or AP courses in the past?

Bree: I have not.

You have not at all. All right. Well, tell me, just briefly, what do you know about an Honors or AP course?

Um, I've heard from other people that it's really hard and like the students who are in the class, the majority of them are like, "Oh, I am ready to drop out already." And I didn't want to put myself in that predicament where especially if I want to graduate on time. Like I want to take classes that I know for a fact that I will pass, like for certain. And if I was to do AP, like I didn't want to put a lot of stress on myself. I mean, I'm not sure like what all my greatest potential is, but I just didn't want to risk it while in high school, so that is the reason why I didn't take it.

That's reason why you didn't. Have you heard anything else about the courses besides the fact that they are hard?

I haven't. I just heard that they were just challenging.

Okay

So, I mean, I can do up to a certain extent, but I feel like if I am taking a basic course now, and that's pretty hard, what is or what would it be like if I was to take an AP? I didn't want to put that on myself. So that was the reason.

Okay. That's fine. All right. So I guess that answers the next question, or maybe it doesn't. Have you ever even thought about it or considered it for any reason?

I thought about taking like an AP Lit class because I love literature. In middle school, I was in like the advanced classes, but I guess I just didn't do that because I mean, I'll do research if I have to, but if I have to write like three papers a week or whatnot, then that's when it gets kind of hectic for me. It's all about the stress – the stress levels.

The stress level. I can understand that.

I also do extracurricular activities. Like during the winter, I am the dance captain, so I have that. And then Mondays and Wednesdays I have Senior Project mentoring that I have to go to, so on top of that then if I was to do an AP class, I didn't just want to like stress it.

Okay. That makes sense. All right, you said that if you could choose one, you would have chosen AP Lit?

Yes, ma'am.

Have you ever had a teacher come to you and suggest to you that you might do well in an Honors course or an AP course?

I have not.

Okay, have you ever had a counselor say anything to you about it?

I have not.

Do you meet with your counselors?

I've met with them over the years, I've met . . . Well, I actually started earlier, um, looking at colleges. Like probably my sophomore year when Coach Z _____ was here. I was talking to him then about like, I was just interested in starting, and everybody kept saying like, "Oh, well, it's too early for you to start looking

now, and I felt like they were wrong because I was like it's never too early to prepare. And, um, I was just emailing, like trying to do things like on my own because when I tried to talk to my counselor, they were like, "Oh well, your senior year we're going to go all over that." And it's like well I'm not really getting any results, so I just felt like, okay something that is so simple like me just asking questions about college, I felt like I'm not really going to get any answers if I ask them about any AP classes.

Okay. Good point. Well, let me ask you this. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses? You mentioned that you have heard a little bit about them. Are any of your immediate friends taking it?

They're not.

Okay. So you're not going to hear any talk that's from close people. All right, um, we talked about that one. If somebody came to you and said, "Your name is on this list, and it says that if you take this course, you have potential to get college credit and to succeed," would that have changed your mind?

I believe it would because I'm all about success. So if somebody was to bring it to my attention, I would consider it strongly. And I would actually think it over. Whereas now at this point in my life, I'm like, "Oh, well. I could have, should have, but I didn't." Because it was never really offered to me, I never really took the initiative to find out more about it. Because I felt like, well I guess apparently if you have a high GPA, then that's where you are in the range. And like I passed my graduation test the first time and the writing test, and it's like whereas my

other friends, who we all came in together, now they're struggling, trying to catch up, and I'm not worried about it now.

So you would be more likely – you said could have, should have when you think back. Do you think it would have mattered to you if it had been a teacher you know or a counselor or someone you didn't know, like me, if I came up and said something to you about the list? Would it matter who told you that you had potential?

It would matter because it's like, well, somebody else sees potential in myself.

It's different coming from a peer, and then you have like administrators and educators who are coming to you personally. Because your peers, your friends are like, "Oh, yeah. You'll do good." But you know that's like all they'll say.

But you have educators who are dealing with different types of kids every day, and then apparently something about you just stood out. And are like, "I can see you doing big things."

But it wouldn't have to be a personal teacher that you knew.

It wouldn't.

It could just be somebody that was associated with the school that says ...

It would actually make me feel good about myself because I'm like, oh I have nothing to do with it. I have never met them a day in my life, but they acknowledge me. Out of a lot of kids, I was kind of like chosen, like the needle in the haystack. And it would make me feel really good to be acknowledged. Like I would consider it strongly.

Thank you. That's a good way to put it. The needle in the haystack and that you're being acknowledged. Um, I know that you're busy with dance and with Senior Project, so

besides extracurricular activities, are there any kind of outside factors that would have influenced you not to take an Honors or AP course? Like any type of peer pressure? Or any type of community pressure? Or any type of influence like that?

Honestly, there isn't.

Okay.

It was just, I guess when you're in school, well then that's what you think about, and outside of school, then you're just in your own other world, so it's not like you think about any other factors really.

Okay. All right. So you kind of mentioned it there, so if you went out to your friends, though, and said to them, "Hey, I'm going to take these Honors courses," would that have changed anything with them? Would that . . .

I think because like, okay, I'll just give you the break down.

Okay

I don't think I would get a very positive vibe because from their situation like I was telling you, they're not on track for graduation, or if they are, they're trying to make it up, and they're nervous if they're going to be half a credit off. So their mindset is negative.

So maybe some kind of feedback, but for those reasons, it wouldn't really bother you because ...

It wouldn't because I feel like they will already have like a "Oh, you think you're better than us." And it has nothing to do with that. It's just I have to do what I have to do for my future because you're not going to help me graduate. You're not going to be there, like, you know. Nobody – well like when you graduate,

you're not going to see these people again. So I don't even let it affect me. If you're happy for me, great. I see that you're really there and you really care about what's going on with me. If you're not, you know.

Do you think there is an atmosphere or an environment at this school that promotes doing well, or one that brings down people because they want to do well?

I feel like, honestly, I do feel that way. It's like if you're not involved in sports, like if you're not a cheerleader, maybe like a football cheerleader or a football player, you're really not acknowledged.

Okay, so I know that you said that your mom is going to support you no matter what. So if you came home and said, "I'm taking all AP courses..."

She would be excited for me. Her biggest argument is going to be are you, is it going to make you feel pressured? That's her biggest thing because I was going to originally going to take Human Anatomy and Physics because I just love science. But she even said, "Do you think that is going to be a heavy load on your plate?" And I was like, maybe you're right. And it turns out it would have been.

It would have been. All right. This is something that I want to ask because I don't know if you know since you are not in Honors courses, I don't know if you have ever seen one, but if you look at a typical Honors or AP course, it is mostly going to be filled with White kids. Is there anything that is causing that, in your opinion, so that we don't have African Americans, Hispanics, or others? Is there anything that the school is doing? Is it cultural? Anything that you see?

I don't think it has anything to do with the school. I just feel that we, um, we have minorities, and they are going to stick together. So they have this mindset

that where you know I guess, it's all about us, you know, and we really don't care. They just have this negative, you know, this negative outlook on a lot of things, and, um, I just feel that it all depends on who you hang out with. Because if you have people who, especially like where they live, in their environment that they live in, if it is underclass or lower class, or what not, they're not going to have a positive perspective. So everything they take is supposed to be positive, they're going to find some way around that and try to flip it to make it seem like it's not good at all. So I don't feel like it has anything to do with like the majorities in the class. I just feel that like whoever you hang out with is who's going to influence you.

So it's going to be peer and community influence more than it is the school?

Yes, ma'am.

Is there anything that we can do here at the school that maybe could change anything?

I think that if the school was more open to, um, I mean I know we have a lot of clubs, but if it was like, what's the word, like if there was more energy towards clubs that was specifically like for different groups, like if we really highlighted it and made it seem like the students are important.

Okay. All right. Well one more question then. We'll go back to when I said if I came to you and said you have this potential, and you said that you would have thought about it.

If we reach out to more students and say, "You have this potential," do you think that would overcome the cultural differences and peer bias or do you think it would not?

I think it would. I think like students here if they just had that little bit of hope because let's say like at home they don't have a support system. Like their

parents say, “You are never going to be anything.” They get it into their minds that they’re not. But if you have that one teacher or that one administrator who like actually like came to you and was like, “You have the potential to be great and successful. That’s cool. You should take this.” I think this would change the student a lot. They just need that one person who can let them know that you can do it.

All right. Well, is there anything else you want to add for me about AP, or Honors, or anything?

If we had, um, like maybe an after school course that introduces it, that introduces what AP is exactly for those who are really interested. Because maybe we’re interested, but we’re not sure because we’re afraid that we’re not smart enough to compete with others. Maybe if we had like, yeah, like an after school course, that like goes through it thoroughly, like step-by-step, exactly what it is, how it’s broken down, how it’s graded, how it looks, you know how it’s ranked on the GPA, I think that would help a lot.

Do you think people would come if we had something like that?

I believe they would because they could ask any question without being humiliated. Like, do you have to be really smart for this class? Or is it like where you are really strong at? Or what would help? And like where can we pinpoint it? I think that would help a lot.

Student Thirteen: James

October 26, 2011

Buice: Okay, here's my first question. Have you ever taken an Honors or AP course?

James: No

No, alright. Have you heard - or what do you know about an Honors or AP course?

Um, that they're hard. You do a lot of writing. And, uh, yeah, basically it's hard and you do a lot of writing.

Okay, anything else you've heard?

No

No? Okay, well let me ask you. Have you ever considered yourself to take an Honors or AP course?

Not really. No

Not really, no. There was a hesitation there, but no.

It was like, well I was thinking about it, but not seriously. I was just thinking about it.

Alright, well what were you thinking or joking or not thinking seriously about taking?

It was actually British Lit, like the Honors class.

You want an Honors class in lit?

Yeah

Okay, all right. So why did you decide that it's not for you?

Senior year. Too much work. I wanted to make it easy.

Okay, so it is a senior year thing. So has a teacher ever come to you and said, "Hey, I think you are doing really well. I think you have the potential to go to an Honors class?"

No

No. What about a counselor?

No

No. Alright. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Uh, yes.

Yes. What do you hear from them about Honors or AP courses?

That their class is pretty easy. It's, um, Honors Anatomy.

Okay

They said it's pretty easy.

Okay

They say the work is fun.

Okay, but there's nothing else you've really heard too much about?

No

All right, um, let me ask you this. If somebody had come to you, whether it's a teacher or a counselor or me or somebody you don't know, and said, "Hey, your name is on this list to potentially do well in an AP course," would you have been more apt to take one?

Probably so

All right. Why do you think so?

Because if I had the potential to do it, I would probably just go ahead and do that.

Um, yeah.

Even if it means more work in your senior year?

Yeah, I mean cause, well yeah, I did hear something about it. It looks good on your transcript for colleges and stuff. Yes, I did hear that, so yeah I would have taken.

Just for college?

Yeah.

All right. The next question is: What do you think your group of friends would have said if you had said, "Hey, I'm going to take Honors or AP Lit next year?" If you had said that last year, what would they have said to you about it?

Um, nothing.

Would they have encouraged you or discouraged you?

No, not discouraged. They would be like, it would be like an okay, or I think you should do it.

Okay, so no discouragement for that reason?

No

What about family? What would your family have said if you had come in and said that you were going to take an Honors or AP course?

Well, I know that my mama probably would have said, "You should take it." And my brother would also say I should take it, too.

Before I ask another question, is there anything you want to add about anything you have thought about?

Um

Alright, well let me ask you this. I look around at my Honors and AP classes, and they are mostly filled with White kids. Not many Hispanic kids, African American kids, Asian kids. Do you think that there is something out there in our school that is causing it?

Uh, like maybe the other kids are lazy and don't really want to do all of the work.

I wouldn't want to think so.

No. So what do you think about – is there any community, like the African American community, just the guys in your group that you know, is there anything that would have caused anybody in your group not to take these? That there is a bias here in the school or the community either one?

No

No, cause we know you guys are smart guys who are all sitting there in that group probably.

Uh-huh

We know that you are smart because you are on the potential list, but it just never crossed your mind to do it too much?

No

So what do you think that we can do here at Cherokee to reach more students? I don't care what color they are – White, Black, Hispanic, whatever. Can we do something to reach more kids?

Let them know that it is possible. Like have the counselors actually tell you that it's a great idea to do it. It looks good on your transcript. And really just tell them that it's not hard, just more work and time consuming.

Time consuming. But you think that if we out to everybody on this big old list and said, "Hey, you have potential to do well in this course," do you think more people would try it?

Yeah, I think so. I would have.

So it more a lack of communication you think more than anything else?

Yeah, I think just getting the communication. You have got to talk to the students. Let them know it's possible.

Yeah. And you can't think of anything else we can specially do to bring in African American students – especially males into some of these literature classes or these math classes or anything?

No

Student Fourteen: Mary

October 27, 2011

Buice: Have you ever been in an Honors or AP course here?

Mary: Uh, no

No? All right, what do you know about Honors or AP courses?

I just know that it's like advanced courses; that kind of all the smarter people are in there. And that it gives you like extra credit, like .5 on your GPA.

Uh-huh. All right, anything else?

No

Well, okay. Have you ever considered taking an Honors or AP course?

I wanted to, but I'm not like, um, I'm not like. . . I wanted to take math AP, but I just want to keep my class, so it won't look, so my grade in math won't look like low.

Alright, so you wanted to keep your grade point average up?

Yes

Okay, good. So you have already answered my next question because why you chose not to do it is because you didn't want to hurt your GPA. All right. Has a teacher ever come to you and said, "I think you need to take an Honors course?"

Well, Miss. . . , yes. It was in math.

It was in math, okay. So the math teacher told you that you should do it, but you still said...

No

No. All right. What about a counselor? Has a counselor ever talked to you about taking an Honors course?

No, not right now.

All right. Um. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Um, only one.

And what does that person say about Honors or AP courses?

She said that they give you a lot of work and that it is kind of easy. It is kind of easy, but you have to get done all your work and study. It's very different from the CP classes.

All right. Good. So you are a junior, right?

Yes

Would you like to take an Honors or AP course next year?

I would like to.

Okay, still in math only?

Yes, math

All right. Well let me ask you this. If somebody came to you, whether it is somebody you didn't know or a counselor or a teacher, and said, "Hey, you're on this list that says you have potential to do well in an AP or Honors course," would you be likely to take it somebody told you that you had the ability to do it?

Yes

Yes. Why would that change your mind?

Cause they will say that, uh, I have the ability to be in that class like, I will feel like smart, like to have the potential to be in that class.

Okay. Do you have any outside factors that would influence you from being able to take the class?

No

No. No job? Nobody saying don't take it?

No

Okay. What do you think your friends would say if you them, "Hey, I'm going to take an Honors or AP course next year?"

They will be like, probably, I don't know. They will be like thrilled, really like they think that I am smart, but I'm kind of not sure.

Okay

So they will be kind of surprised like. Some of them will be like, "Oh, I thought you were already in Honors classes." Or "You need to be in one of them."

Okay. What would your family say if you went home and said that you were going to take an Honors or AP course?

Well, they would be really proud.

When I look around my Honors and AP classes, we don't have a lot of diversity in those classes. We don't have a lot of Hispanic students. We don't have a lot of African American students. We don't have a lot of Asian students. So do you know anything that would be causing that to happen?

Uh, I don't know.

Is there anything that the school might be doing to cause this?

No, uh, I know that like a lot of Hispanic people, they're staying in ESOL, so there's like, that's kind of what they like, they don't want to ruin their grades. Or probably because they don't want to like fail.

Okay

Like they think that it's hard to take those classes.

So they are more worried about grades and failure than they are ...

Yes

Would there be anybody who would give you a hard time if you took an Honors or AP class?

No

No. So it's not that anybody would give students a hard time about it. They're just worried about failing.

Uh-huh

Is there anything in the community as far as when you go out into the real world out there that anyone would say anything to you about taking an Honors or AP class?

No

It wouldn't be looked down upon? So it would be looked up on?

Yes

Okay, so it's not really anything that anybody's doing; it's just the own students' concerns for their grades you think?

Uh-huh

Okay. Well, is there anything that we can do here as a school then that could help students understand that they could do well in those classes maybe?

Probably like telling them that it won't affect their grades. That it will be better because sometimes like the AP classes or Honors classes, they make you do like have an extra grade point average to your grade, and probably that will like concern them. Like, they might think about it and like it on their work.

Student Fifteen: Jonathan

November 7, 2011

Buice: Have you ever been in an Honors or AP course?

Jonathan: Yes

Yes. What were you in?

Honors World History.

Honors World History? Is that it?

I think so.

Okay. So tell me what you know about Honors and AP courses?

It's just like you get a different kind of credit for it. And it's harder work.

And it's harder work? All right. Do you know anything else about it?

Not really.

Why did you choose not to take any more Honors courses after that one?

Because I didn't do all the work because I procrastinated a lot.

Okay

And so it affected my grade. So I just decided that it would be better for me if I didn't take it and I got better grades.

Okay. So it was all about the work and the procrastination.

Pretty much.

Um, has a teacher ever come to you and said that you should probably take an Honors course or recommended an Honors course to you?

I think my teacher did when I was a freshman. My history teacher, so that's why I took it.

And that's why you took it. All right. A teacher did when you were a freshman, but then you said, "All right, no more."

Yeah

So you didn't have any freshman ...

Well, my math teacher said I should take AP Stats last year, but I didn't.

Again because of the work load?

Yeah

All right. Has a counselor ever talked to you about it?

No

No. Nothing from a counselor. Do you have any friends who are taking Honors or AP courses?

Uh-huh

And what do they say?

They say it's more work, but if you do it, then you're fine.

Okay

It's not hard. It's just a lot more work.

Okay. Anything else?

No

All right. Are your friends who take the AP and Honors courses, are they Black?

Hispanic? A mixture of different groups of peoples? What are they?

All

All? So you have friends from all ethnicities who are taking these courses?

Uh-huh

All right. Would have been more likely to take an Honors or AP course if instead of that teacher coming to you, somebody you didn't know came to you and said, "You're name is on this list. You have potential to do well based on your test scores?" Would that have persuaded you in any way?

I would have thought it more, I guess, but I'm not really sure.

Because it's not a lack of ability on your part I think you are saying.

Right. I'm very lazy.

All right. So it's the laziness that causing the lack of the work. Do you have any outside factors that came into play, making you decide not to take the courses?

Kind of the time. I would now. But I don't think at the time, no. Like at the time, in previous years. But I guess if you ask me now, I would have some.

Okay, like work? Is that what you are talking about?

Yeah and some other stuff

Okay. Um, so what do you think your friends would have said last year if you had come to them and said, "Hey, I have decided to take an AP course next year?" Would they have had any comments about it?

I'm not sure.

Would they have supported you in your decision?

I hope. I think they would.

What about your family? What does your family think about your taking an Honors or AP course?

They just tell me to do the best I can. So if I took that, they would just expect more out of me. Kind of like my teachers would.

Let me ask you this. Did the HOPE GPA ever come into your thoughts when you were thinking about Honors, or in general was it just the work?

It did a little bit, but I don't know if it really changed my decision.

Okay, so it was just the work?

Yeah

And not getting the work done.

Pretty much

Al right. Now when we look around in our classrooms in Honors and AP, we don't see a lot of Hispanic students or African American students, so that's why I was asking about your friends. So, do you think that there is anything that we do at this school that discourages people in general from not taking AP or Honors courses?

I'm not sure.

No? Do you see anything or have you heard anything that might discourage people of minorities from taking these courses?

I don't think anything really discourages them, but I think it's just what they're used to. I'm not sure.

Okay. Well, is there anything that you can think of that the school can do to encourage more people to take these courses?

I think that they could show them, like, that they have the same potential as other people.

Okay. So, getting that list out there so everybody can see it?

Right

Okay. Anything else?

Um, you said that there was that list, but maybe if you told the students that came up on the list, then that might change their minds because if they don't think they can do it, but they're on that list, and they don't know that, then they might not like consider it. I think sometimes the students play it safe but regret it later.

Alright. Good point. I agree. Anything else?

Not that I can think of.

Student 16: Bethany

November 7, 2011

Buice: It has been a while since I looked at your blue sheet, so tell me; have you ever taken an Honors or AP course?

Bethany: Uh, I pretty sure I haven't. I probably would remember if I would have.

Okay. So what do you know about Honors and AP courses?

Basically, that they're just more challenging.

Okay

You know. Make you, um, work hard, and to be honest with you, I'm just lazy.

(Laughs)

Okay (laugh)

So, yeah, my friends take them, and they seem to like them all right, but you know. Again, I'm just lazy. (laughs)

Just lazy. (laughs) Alright. Well, that's all right.

Yeah

Well, have you even considered taking one?

I, my Spanish teacher my sophomore year asked me if I wanted to do Honors, and I was like, no thank you. (laughs) But other than that, I really haven't.

So only in Spanish?

Yeah. I wasn't even that good at it. (Laughs)

She must have thought you were.

Yeah. I couldn't even speak it, but. . . (laughs)

All right. So I think you sort of answered my next question because it was “Why did you choose not to take it?” You just decided that it wasn’t for you?

Yeah. Easier out and get done.

Easier out and get done. Alright. So you said your Spanish teacher had recommended you. Have you ever had any other teacher come to you and recommend any other Honors courses to you?

No

What about the school counselor?

Um, because the only school counselors I’ve ever talked to have been last year and then this year, and that’s just for graduation. That’s all.

All right. So they don’t really talk to you about your classes or anything?

No

All right. So you said that you have some friends who take Honors and AP courses.

What do they say about the courses?

Well, they seem to like them, and they’re really smart, so I guess that they’re – that they just don’t care. It just comes easy to them.

Right

But I don’t know.

But not for you, though?

Yeah. (Laughs) And my sister takes them, but well you know. I don’t know.

Okay

Yeah.

Alright. Um, let me ask you this. If a teacher or anybody had come to you from the school system and said, "Your name is on this list that shows that you have potential to do well in this class," would you have been more likely to take it?

Oh, definitely. Definitely.

Why do you think that would have made a difference?

Cause it, because I wouldn't have been struggling, you know. Then I wouldn't just have to worry about that class instead of another class. So...

So just the fact that someone would say it to you would make you say, "I don't want to be lazy. I'm going to work and do it."

Oh, probably, yeah.

It's interesting. Everybody's saying that. It's just a trend I'm seeing.

Um, I mean, if you thought that you could do, then you would do it.

I see what you're saying.

Like last year my math teacher asked me if I wanted to do preCal because I was just going to do the easy class. You know, the math finance or whatever, just cause I'm lazy. And then she was like, "No, I think you should do this." So I did it. Not doing all that hot, but I'll pull it up.

Okay. Would there be any outside factors that would enter into your deciding not to take any of the harder classes? Like work, home, or anything that would impact you?

No, I mean, I don't have a job yet because I'm really just trying to focus on school, and I don't need that on top of it. Except that I'm not doing so good in math. But other than that, I'm really. . . I mean, home life's good.

Okay

I just know that sometimes people have responsibilities at home, responsibilities that they can't...

Yeah

Okay. All right. So if you had come to your friends last year and said, "Hey, guys, I decided to take an AP or Honors course," what would your friends have said about it?

They would have been like, "Yeah, right. That's a load of crap." (laughs) "You are not doing that."

(Laughs) So they know you well?

Yes, they do.

All right. Um, what about your family? What would your family say if you said that you were going to go the Honors route?

They ... I don't... They would probably be like, "Really?" But then they would be like, "That's cool," because like I said, my sister does it. So, you know. They wouldn't really pay any mind to it. It's okay.

Well, let me ask you this. We don't...we have a huge list on the AP Potential, but we have small groups in Honors classes and the AP classes. Do you think that there's anything that we do here at this school that might cause students not to take the courses?

I don't think so other than just testing and harder work because people stress out taking a test. I am one of those people. You know, I can do fine on a quiz or anything because I know it's not going to be that much, and if I mess up, it's not that big of a deal. But tests just kick my butt. So it may be that. I mean for me, it would be that. Um, but I don't know if that's just me.

Does the HOPE Scholarship GPA come into your thinking at all with this?

Um, not really. I mean, I just, um, I get what I get no matter what level of classes I'm on. It didn't really phase me.

Well, do you think that there's anything that we can do here as a school that could reach more students and get more students involved in Honors and AP courses?

I don't know. I mean I just think it's just – kids are going to do what they want now, and then they are going to be, “Man, I should have done that.” So I don't know. I guess, um, I don't know. I don't know.

But you said that if I came to you and said that you would be good in this class...

Yeah, if I had the potential and I was just exceeding in my other class, and then I would be like, “All right.” But you know.

So from your view point as a student, you can't see anything that we are doing to keep students people from going, but you can't see anything that we could do really to involve more people in the program?

No

Do you think people look at the Honors and AP classes in a different way than they do the other classes? I don't know if that is a good way to ask that question or not.

I think that most people just think that “Aw, that just the smarter class than just the normal, average class.” Not a dumb class. I mean, that's just an average class. A lot of people take that.

So they're looked at as the smart class?

Yeah

Do you think that they look at kids differently who take Honors and AP courses?

I don't. I mean, some of my friends are in them, and they're just as dorky as they would be out in public somewhere. (laughs)

So they are not really any different?

No

Appendix I – Focus Group Transcript

Buice: *It looks like this is going to be all who get here today. Let me explain what we are doing. I have already given each of you the transcripts from your individual interviews with me. You have looked over those and made sure that they are correct.*

After the interviews, I took what you said and looked for patterns to your answers. I highlighted those patterns and developed some questions based on them. I already had a set of questions ready, so I will ask you those questions plus any new ones that come up based on your previous answers or the answers you may give today.

This meeting is known as a focus group. If you hear an answer and that answer makes you think of something else, please don't hesitate to jump in and add what you want to say. I just ask that you identify yourselves by the number I have assigned you so that I can identify you in the audio recording.

My first focus group question that I had written is "What do you think is the greatest factor that causes students not to take AP or Honors courses?" These are the things that you guys mentioned, and this is what we want to talk about. I heard almost everybody mention your grades; you didn't want it to hurt your grades and your GPA. Nobody much mentioned the HOPE unless I mentioned it to you; that didn't seem to be a huge factor. You mentioned the work load, too much work going in with everything else, and you mentioned the fear of not graduating on time. Is there anything you want to add to that or anything you want to say about any of those areas or any other areas?

Sally: *If you have like an AP or Honors class, and you do really well in that class, would you really have like, like, would you really have a better chance to get the HOPE Scholarship or anything like that?*

The HOPE Scholarship is unfortunately not based on – it is based on unweighted GPA. So if you have a B in a class, and it is an AP class, you get your 10 points and you get an A so that you could be valedictorian or salutatorian; it works on that GPA, but it does not work on the HOPE, so that's why people are afraid to take it. Because those classes are harder, grades go down, but then there's the problem. (Late student enters.) Come in. Hello. Come and join us. Here's your spot.

Bree: Thank you.

You're welcome. All right, um, what is it about the work load that you so fear? What have you heard about this work load?

Sally: You have to read like a lot of books. You have to, um, do projects, and the homework, and everything like that. It just sounds like a lot of work.

Okay. Anybody else? Anything about grades or...?

Paris: I just heard that it is a lot, you know, to do with a lot of work you have to do, and it is just too much for a lot of people. And I know, um, people that just drop out of their classes just because it is just too much.

Too much. So the work is not worth the extra you are going to get from a class that may be a more advanced class?

Paris: Yes

Okay. Were you going to add something?

Kaitlyn: Yes, I was going to say that sometimes it might, like it they have a job, it might like be complicated to squeeze in the homework if they have a lot and work.

Okay. Can you think of any other reasons besides those that I have mentioned that would keep people from taking it? Do you think that's the main thing?

Anthony: Sometimes they can progress a lot faster in the units, so they won't be able to keep up as easily.

Right. So just the speed of it still. Is there any kind of anything out there in the _____ High School community that people are put down or made fun of because they're the smart kids or they take smart classes?

Bree: I don't think so necessarily, but it kind of does draw a borderline because it's like some people think that oh because they in AP, I mean their stress levels are going to be different, but I feel like everybody has a lot of load on their shoulders, so some people who are in AP are like, "Yeah, I'm taking this and taking that," and it kind of like, like makes a barrier between others. It's like, "Oh, so you think that you're better than everyone else because you are in advanced class." Like some people who have the, um, what is it? I can't say it. Like some people who probably have the credentials to do it, probably just don't want to or feel like they can't. That's probably – it's like so many factors.

Some many factors. Okay. So my second focus question was going to be what do you think that the school can do to encourage more kids to take Honors and AP classes. Two things came up from all the people I interviewed. One that was mentioned was having a meeting with everybody. And the other thing that was mentioned a lot was just to tell kids that they are on the list. So what kind of ideas do you have about that, and why do you think that will work so well?

Sally: Some kids don't know that they are on the list, and they, like they think that they might, well if it says that they have done really well, they think that they could do well to qualify for the classes, but someone who does just as good, they don't qualify for the classes. Like they don't try to figure out if they are. They just want other people to come to them and tell them.

So you come to me and tell me, and then I'll try it. What is it about just having your name on a list instead of a teacher just telling you? Several of you said you have had a teacher say, "You should take this," and you said, "I don't want to." But then later on in the interview, I would say, "But what if your name is on a list?" And you went, "Yeah, I would do it then."

Bree: If you are on a list, you just feel special. Just like anything. It's like in your, like, like, well, people will be able to know who you are and you can like, you can reach expectations that some people may not realize that you can. If that makes sense?

Okay. It does. Does anyone else want to add anything?

Paris: Ditto

.Okay, for question #3, this is interesting. What do you think that the counselors can do to encourage more kids to take Honors and AP classes? Not one student that I had, that I interviewed, said that you go up and talk to your counselor just about "stuff." Several people said that they didn't even know who the counselors were. And several people also said, "Well, I meet [the counselor] only to figure out what I need to graduate. So, let's talk about counselors a little bit here because they apparently, according to what you told me, play no role at all in what you decide to take. Bree?

Bree: Counselors just stress me out sometimes. Like, it's... well, they should play a role that is kind of like your parent from home, you know. And they don't really take that effort to meet their kids, like the person they are assigned to, and it's just, well, I think it's really just a distance relationship. I don't think they really try to get to know each student or talk to them personally on a personal level. I know when I go in there, they are quick to rush you out – in and out and in and out. I'm like, it's not personal at all.

Okay

Paris: I don't feel welcomed.

You don't feel welcomed? All right. Does anybody else have anything to add to that?

Bree: It's like if you were to go to talk to a counselor, probably about scholarships, and this, that, and the other, then they will give you the basics. Like they - it seems like each student is just a student ID to them. Like it is not a person. Like they're like, "Oh, we see a hundred kids a day." It's like, well, aren't we important, like isn't each person important? Like, don't say, "This is what you need." Tell me what's good for me. Like don't tell me like, tell me like what you feel will really help me, not like what has worked for others because not everybody learns the same way.

Okay

Bree: So, like counselors need to be a little bit more patient, and like, my thing is that you're in a field where you are going to be surrounded around by people from different households who are experiencing different things, so it's like you need to take, um, each situation and treat them all special like they are special cases.

Okay. Somebody else? All right

Sally: I would definitely have to agree with that, like they don't take you personal – they don't get to know you at all. They don't put you into perspective. Like they just treat you like she said – a student ID number and that's it. Like they don't apply anything or try to get to know you. They don't do anything to even, like, try at all. You are just another person.

So what do you see as the role of the counselor here?

Kaitlyn: I feel they don't have any role.

You feel they don't have any role at all?

Kaitlyn: Uh-uh (no). I think they are just like – there. Just there.

Just there? And not at all – (Nods and yes from the entire group.) I hear agreement over here.

Bree: Actually, I was, um, thinking like basically how the school is set up. You have like the staff. You have the people who like help clean the buildings. Then you have the teachers who actually help the students. And then you have the administrators, the principal and all of them, who, you know, make sure that everything runs well. It's like, where do the counselors come into play? Like, they're here, but they're not here. Like they stay to themselves in their offices, and when we do go in there, like, at least when they are talking to somebody, like all of our lives we are told, "Make sure you tell somebody how you are feeling, express how you are feeling." And it seems like whenever we walk in there, they're like, "Here comes another sob case." Like you are supposed to listen to us and help us, not talk to us like, you know, you have never seen us before. So if

they had a little bit more compassion and actually took everything like serious and actually listen to what we have to say, then we will feel comfortable coming to them about anything.

Okay. Paris?

Paris: Well, I actually, to add on to that, I honestly didn't know that our counselors were counselors that you can go and talk to if you are having a bad day. I didn't know that, honestly. I thought that it was just business.

Just business. And business, though, has nothing to do with what class would be best for you? Business, you are saying, is saying only that you have got to have classes to graduate.

Bree: Uh-hum. Yes.

Okay.

Sally: Like, you can talk to the nurse more about your feelings than you could to the counselors. And the counselors – like the nurse is just one person, and there are several counselors. And the nurse knows you by name and everything, and the counselors don't. Like, there's nothing there.

Kaitlyn: I think sometimes it's kind of awkward to talk to them.

Awkward? Why do you say that? It is because you don't know them?

Kaitlyn: Yes! They just keep talking, and I feel like they don't let you talk.

Like, they always interrupt, and they don't ask, "What do you think? How do you feel about it?"

Okay. All right, so now that we have talked about the counselors, we see that maybe they can take on a different role in the future as far as if you had your way. It would be a

different role where maybe they are advising you more about classes to take and those kinds of things. But if counselors don't do that, do teachers do that for you? Do teachers take the time to say, "You should be here, or you should be there." Or do they mostly at registration time just sign a card?

Bree: I think it depends on the teacher. Like some teachers take their job like too serious, and they're all about like just about the money. Like, they're just here for a paycheck. And then you have other teachers who actually enjoy teaching and who actually want to see their students succeed. Cause my thing is like, why are you – what's the point of going through the schooling and the years, the long years? Like you came from school and now you are going back to school to become a teacher. Like, what's the point if you're not going to be sincere about it? Like, you are changing people's lives. Like, honestly, I feel like one teacher can change like a student's life, whether they want to drop out or like whether they can like go on to be a doctor. So, it's all about how the teachers like respond to us.

But as far as sitting down and really advising you, do teachers ever really just sit down and advise you?

Paris: (Long sigh) No

No. Okay. That's fine. That's what I need to know. All right, the second thing – we'll move on now. The second thing that was on the list here was you said that – well, several of you mentioned having a meeting at night. But let me ask about this. If we had a meeting at night to say what AP is all about, this is what Honors is all about, do you think kids and parents would show up to those meetings?

Paris: Yeah. My parents would. My parents are like always wanting to meet the teachers and to talk to the teachers, so I know my parents would.

Sally: If you're truly sincere, and you want to do it, and your parents, like they agree with you, and they think that you would be able to do it, and then maybe they would. But depending on the person and the family, I think that's what it depends on.

Okay.

Bree: Okay, so I was like, I was just thinking, and honestly, it could go both ways really because to be in an AP class, it depends on who you hang around with also. Because if you hang around people who don't care to like go anywhere, who's not looking toward graduating, they're just looking toward today, then they'll probably like, uh, dampen your future a little bit because you're thinking, "Oh, that's not cool, so I'm not going to go because my friends, they're not going to go." But maybe your friends aren't academically able to. Maybe you just happen to be that one needle in a haystack who happens to stand out, but you don't take the time to show who you really are because you're afraid of what your peers may think. And also, if you have some students who want to go for it, if the parents are supporting them, and if you don't have friends supporting them, then they're like, "What's the point?" So, I mean if we are like able to make it interesting, like something fun, something to help you not hurt you – just to challenge you to see how far you can go, then I think it would be – it would be worth trying.

Okay, well I think it's a good idea. All right, let's move on. Um, we kind of talked about my next question in there because it was, "What do you think teachers can do to encourage more students to take Honors and AP classes?" And only two said that a teacher had ever encouraged them to take the classes. But now, here's my question to you. Last year I sent out a list to every AP and Honors teacher of all the AP Potential kids. These kids have potential to be in this class, so if you teach them, talk to them and say so. Then I went to all the junior English – well all English teachers – and gave them a list and said, "If they are on here for English, talk to everybody." So I wanted you to answer that; do teachers talk to you about it? Some do, but somebody said in one of the interviews, "I sit in the class and make A's, and a teacher has never said, 'You need to move on.'" Yes, ma'am, Sally?

Sally: Um, like what really happens is like if I was like in the AP class, I would feel more challenged, and I would like actually turn in my work. I feel like I am not challenged enough. Like, it's just boring. And, like why should I be doing this if it's going to be boring. It's not challenging me at all. So I don't turn in my work; it's just not something I do.

But if you got in an AP class where you were challenged, you would do the work more, you think.

Sally: Yes. It would interest me more.

Okay. But to piggy-back off what you said, I had a student whose name appeared on the AP Potential list, and I happened to know the family, and I called home and said, "Her name on here." They said, "She's never taken an Honors course." And I said, "Well, she's on this list for AP Potential, and she could be in my AP Lit class." And she said

exactly what you said. She said, "I didn't do my work, and suddenly I found a class I loved. It was exciting." She took it and AP Environmental Science and aced both tests and went to college with two credits already. So we have to go to reach those kids, and that's what this whole thing is all about – how to reach the right kids. You know, your name could be on the list, but if you don't do the work, and you're not motivated, then it's not going to matter what class you are sitting in. So my role is – figuring out how can I reach those kids. One of the things that I was looking at too is that we are looking at how the dynamics of the school are changing. You know, we're not all White, lower middle to upper class around here anymore. We have a lot of ethnicities coming in now. We have people here from Russia; we have people here from Eastern Asia; we have people here from all over the different countries. We have a growing Hispanic population; we have an African American population, and an Asian population. But if we look at our faculty, our faculty does not reflect that. So do you think that there is any kind of bias that the teachers – I don't mean that the teachers say, "Oh, because you are so and so." But do you think that there is some type of bias that is an unintentional bias on the part of any of the teachers because they just don't recognize? I don't know what they don't recognize. I don't know what I am trying to ask. But do you think that there is anything there with that?

Sally: I think that there is. Like, I know that I have seen like a lot of teachers, like they'll have two students – one's a White student and one's like Hispanic or like African American, and they'll go to the White students instead of going to the other student and say, "You're doing really well in this class. You should be in AP." But they won't do that to the other students, and I don't know if they are

like undermining them on purpose or on accident. Like, I don't know. But I have seen that a lot, and that kind of - well it kind of makes me want to turn away and not do it at all.

Okay

Kaitlyn: I think that just because you are dark skinned or have black hair or any kind of type of color and you're not white, like they might think you are kind of slower. Or to be rude – to be dumb. Because I think that some teachers think just because we're not from here or where they grew up that we might not have the same levels as other people can.

Okay. Okay, so what --- You as students maybe can't do anything to combat that unless you say, "I'm going to take these advanced classes," and motivate yourselves. If you are not getting that motivation from the counselors, which you have told me you are not. You are not getting it necessarily from your teachers. Um, so are you getting motivated from your family to take the harder courses, or would your family, do you think --- let's don't talk about you. Let's talk about it in general; then we will talk about you. A lot of families would rather see all A's on a report card in a college prep class than B's and C's on a report card in Honors or AP classes. So do you think that might be a part of what's going on, too?

(Uh-hum, yes from most of the group.)

Bree: As long as you're doing really well, I feel like the parents will be proud of you all the way because, like in my mind, any parent will want their child to excel in their school work, and you know, to make something of themselves. Whereas, if you are taking like an AP class, and you are failing, then they are going to be

disappointed, and it's like they don't understand how much work you have on you unless they were actually in your shoes. And some parents are like all about perfection because probably they were pushed when they were in school, so it could probably just happen like that.

Okay. Anybody else have anything on that?

Sally: Um, I know some students, like they are taking AP courses, and their parents, like they get very angry if they even get like an 86 or 89 on a paper, or even like in the class. And I think it makes like a lot of difference because if they weren't taking the AP course and they were taking the normal class, they wouldn't be pushing as hard; their parents would not be as hard on them as they would be if they were taking AP or Honors.

So maybe at that meeting that some of you have said that we should have --- one of the things we talked about as we used to do the meeting, we would talk and say, " You know, a B in an AP course is just as good as, if not better than, an A in a college prep course because you are being pushed so hard." You are going to get your ten points, but they are looking at it without the ten points. So maybe we can do that and push that.

Anything else on that topic before I move on?

Paris: I just feel like everybody's just snatching the words out of my mouth, so I am kind of speechless.

Okay, so you are kind of agreeing with the things that are being said around here.

Paris: Definitely

Because when we were talking about teachers a minute ago, I saw you kind of like “I want to say something, but I don’t know if I should say it not.” It’s the feeling I got from you.

Paris: Yeah, it’s like, um, like it never – I guess it’s kind of like taboo. Like I have never seen it first-hand, but I know it’s out there. I don’t know if it’s here, but it’s just---

But you have never seen it here?

Paris: No, not in any of my classes.

So, see that to me at least says we’re maybe on the right track. Um, let’s move on, and then there’s something else – I thought of one thing I want to add in a minute – but let’s go through these questions first. What do you think that other students can do to encourage students to take AP and Honors classes? This is what I got. Everybody I talked to said none of their friends would discourage them. One girl said, uh, they might think I’m crazy or say, “Are you sure you want to do this?” I heard this from a couple of people, but nobody said, “Oh, you don’t want to take those courses.” I didn’t get that from anybody. Some did mention that they had been put down for being smart, and then one phrase that came up; the term “acting white” came up.

Paris: Uh-huh

So, do you see anybody in this school, or in your community, or within your friends, putting down people because they are trying to “act white,” or be in AP courses, or do any of those things?

Paris: Um, in my lit class now, there are these two boys, wicked smart. They’re just like, oh my gosh, and they always comment on just everything. And I think

that there's a difference between being smart, and being cocky, and just being flat out annoying. And they fit all three categories. (Laughs) But I mean a lot of people get annoyed with it because, I mean, they say a lot of stuff that is like, you know, you won't think about because you don't read as many books as they do or anything, but it's just that sometimes I think that if you're really smart, some guys, or just people in general who are really smart, tend to flaunt it a little bit. There's nothing wrong with being smart at all. I mean, overall, I think that's like a really good thing; it will get you somewhere in life. But it's just the difference between being humble about it instead of being you know so--- some people even use it, use their knowledge to be rude to other people that don't understand. Or, you know, they lose their patience and something like that, and I just think it's a thin line.

A thin line. But do we have groups of people here, though, who put down people because they make good grades in your classes? Do we have that here?

Bree: Honestly, I feel like in the African American community, like I feel like there is a separation there because you have those who are actually trying to make something out of themselves, and then you have the other group who's negative. Who are like, "Oh, you think you are so much better than us" because you are actually trying and because you may speak with proper diction, and they have a problem with that. Like, they want --- it's like they are not happy to see one of their own succeed. So that could probably be like a little bit intimidating for them, and they really don't know how to respond to it because maybe all they know is like hanging out with their friends, like going to the clubs and what not,

and not realizing that, well , you have to look past this because in a couple of months, or what not, you're going to graduating. Like do you still want to be in high school until like you have to be kicked out, or do you actually want to graduate on time?

Paris: I agree with her. It's, uh, that's a big issue in the African American community. Like if you see one African American succeed, they are always being put down by their own, and it's one of those --- it's not taboo at all; you see it all the time. Like, I don't know what it is; I don't understand it, never have. I don't get it, and I mean it's a problem. It's bad.

So is it – it's more community based -

Paris: Yes

Bree: Uh-huh

than school based?

Paris: Yes

Okay. All right. Anyone else want to add to that?

Kaitlyn: We say in Spanish, “It comes in from one ear, and it comes out to the other.” And I think, yes you can hear their opinion, but it has to matter to yourself. It has to be something what you want to do, not what other people think. And it has to make you feel important; make yourself feel important most of all, and then cause after that, you can look down at the people and be like, “Yes, I didn't need your help.” I did it for myself, and then I might be earning a lot of money and then helping families or helping other people. So it doesn't matter what they say; it just has to be important to yourself.

Yes, ma'am, Sally.

Sally: Like, I have never been around like my own ethnic group really. Like, I have never lived in a community where it's just White people or anything, so I don't really know what they say. But like, I've always been accepted into like the different communities and stuff, so I've heard that thing that Kaitlyn said, and I've heard the things that like Paris and Bree have said, and I would like to agree with that. I think that like no matter where you are or who you are, it depends on the community and who are in the community and how you fit into the community.

I read something in all this research that said that the community – it's called the social contagion theory. And it says that the community is contagious, whether the community is your school, your friends, whatever, it's all contagious because you want to act like everybody else is acting if they are your friends, your family, or your community. But you have to have your own antidote, and that antidote is that voice within yourself. The antidote may be the school; it may be whatever it is, but you find it and combat it because it's all about you.

Um, I asked you about community; well, I didn't ask you about community, but you mentioned it. This is what some of you said. Um, mostly what I got is that parents sometimes don't push kids as hard, um, as they need to be pushed because they are looking for the kids to do just what the kids want to do. There's not that emphasis on education. Some of you mentioned that you got where you are because you have parents who pushed you to do well. We see that not having support is a problem, but I don't know how we are going to combat that. I want to end with asking what you think my

hope is, or what do you think maybe I can accomplish with this research project, and then I will end by telling you my hope and why I am doing it. So, what do you think I might accomplish with everything I have gathered from all of y'all?

Bree: Okay, um, I feel like being that you have different races here, and you have different genders. I feel like you are able to like step into our world for a minute to see like, okay, what do we all have in common. Well, we already know that we have the potential to succeed in the AP class, but what is different about us? Well, it depends on the communities that we came from, and it also depends on um, like, um, teachers saying, “Yeah, go for it.” Or teachers just passing you by and not acknowledging that you can be something really great if you are just given the opportunity. So maybe like after you are done with your research, you can just like, I don’t know, have like, I really want to say a meeting, I really want to say it...

Well, say it. That’s okay.

Bree: Well, I’ll say it. Just go ahead and have a meeting and then just like we can answer the ifs, and buts, and whys. Like why some people wouldn’t do it, and allow others to know that you acknowledge what they may be thinking. Cause some people may not be brave enough to tell you, “I don’t feel like I will be able to do it.” Or, “My friends wouldn’t be accepting of it.” So, you already understand where they may be coming from without them having to say anything.

Paris: Um, I think you could accomplish, um, getting your staff involved more – getting counselors involved more. Please like, whoooo!

Anthony: I still haven’t many any of them.

You still haven't met any of them. Anthony hasn't met a counselor yet. Anthony, what grade are you in?

Anthony: Tenth. Like, I don't even know their names.

Okay.

Kaitlyn: It's sad.

It is sad says Kaitlyn. Okay, anybody else want to say anything? All right, well I'm going to keep recording, but I want to tell you why I chose this topic. I chose it originally because I had several ideas in mind, and I met with some people from the central office, and they said, "We need to grow our Honors and AP program. And you love teaching and you teach a lot of Honors and AP kids, so why don't you look into this?" So I started doing some research, and the more research that I did, the more I found out that kids who take Honors and AP courses, as a whole, are more apt to stay in college as well because the challenges they meet in high school prepares them for the challenges they might meet in college. Does it mean that if you don't take any you are not going to be successful? Not at all. We didn't have AP here when I was in school, and I was successful, so we are not saying that at all. But, um, it also said that sometimes AP and Honors classes open the doors for people who have been around friends or community members who don't value education to be in a group and make new friends with people who do value education. And so it would give you a different perspective. So as I started researching more and more, I thought, well, that's cool, but if you don't want to take AP and Honors, what do I need to do? Then I started looking at this list. And this list is pages long of kids who have potential and who aren't reaching it.

Bree: That's a big stack.

And my job as a teacher and every other person's job as a teacher around here is to take every one of you and love you all and make sure you reach your greatest potential. And if your greatest potential is in a special education class doing what you can do, then that's great. But if your greatest potential is to get college credit while you are still in high school, then we're looking for that, too. So, my goal was to see what I could do here at this school to make some changes so that we could reach more kids so that they could reach their greatest potential. And if we can get five more kids next year, and maybe ten more the next year --- I'm not going to set my goal too high. I'd like to; I'd like to get everybody in there, but I want to be honest, too. There are a lot of kids who have potential, but they just don't want to do the work. There life is busy; there life is hectic. They say, "I know I can't do it," or "I would love to do it, but I can't." I totally understand that, but if we have somebody who wants to, who has been overlooked, or who never --- the greatest fun that I had, besides meeting you guys because I think I have met a lot of really nice people, was when I would show some kids (I don't know if I showed you all) the list, and the smiles that would be on faces when I would say, "You have potential in this class." They would go, "Wow, really?" And so to make people feel good about themselves. So I want to thank you for helping me do this. I don't know what is going to be the result of it. I have no idea, but I know that I found some things that are concerning to me. I found some things that are positive to me, and I'm going to find a way now to see what I can do to maybe be the cause of some changes around here. One last question. How many of you were even in AIM or any gifted courses in elementary school or middle school?

Paris: I was in a magnet school.

A magnet school?

Paris: All my elementary and middle school years.

Anybody else?

Bree: I was, um, in a private school in elementary.

*All right. One of the things was I wondering about, if you get in it younger, like in AIM --
- if you get in more gifted classes when you are younger, you tend to stay in them, and I
was just supposed to ask that question, and I forgot.*

Paris: I'm not going to lie. I feel like middle school was harder than high school. I'm like, I'm serious.

Bree: The math

Paris: Cause it was a magnet school, and in magnet schools you have to

(hesitates)

What type of magnet?

Paris: I went to the, um

Was it like a magnet for the arts, for technology?

Paris: For technology

For technology, okay.

Paris: For technology and math. It was called C. T. Walker Magnet School.

And it was so hard. I just remember it being so hard.

If you take those AP courses, it would so hard, too.

Paris: I know (laughs).

What can I do for anybody else?

Bree: Just keep working.

Kaitlyn: We need more teachers like you.

Thank you.

Paris: Yeah, more teachers that genuinely care.

Kaitlyn: I think if teachers are nice to students, students will be nice back.

I have always said that. I will give back whatever you give to me, and I am sure that you are the same way. If somebody is nice to you, you are going to be nice back.

Paris: I enjoyed this.

Bree: This was actually fun.

See, it wasn't so bad. I enjoyed it, too. All of this research, I enjoyed it. Thank you for your help.