UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN HIGHER LEVEL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES IN THE LOW COUNTRY OF SOUTH CAROLINA: A CASE STUDY

by

Lori Kristen Thomas

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study is to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement (AP) and honors-level high school classes. The theory guiding this study was the invitational theory introduced by Purkey (1978). The invitational theory focuses on the phenomenon that learning is enhanced when people are encouraged to participate or invited into an educational experience. This case study was set in three high schools in a suburban school district in the Low Country of South Carolina and explored the experiences of 12 teachers with the recommendation process. Data collection included interviews with teachers, surveys with school counselors, and documents from the school levels. Throughout the case study, teachers' experience with the recommendation process was analyzed using coding, pattern matching, and constant comparison while developing the thematic units of this study using cross-case analysis. Five themes related to the research questions emerged through data analysis: gifted and talented services and support, the recommendation process, the underrepresentation of minority students in AP and honors-level classes, increasing enrollment in AP and honors-level classes, and collaboration of stakeholders. The results of this study revealed that teachers use various indicators to identify students for higher-level courses but identified a need for more professional development to support the process. Teachers experienced an underrepresentation of minority students in upper-level classes and gained an understanding of the need to increase the number of students enrolling in higher-level courses.

Keywords: teacher recommendations, high school, honors classes, Advanced Placement, minority students

Copyright Page

Dedication (Optional)

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, John. Your love and support throughout my life have been never-ending. You have always believed that I am the best at whatever I have taken on, whether on the volleyball court or in the classroom as a teacher. You have taught me to be loyal in my professional career and work hard to meet my professional goals. Your strength to fight to stay with your family following your accident and battle with cancer was inspiring, and I am incredibly grateful for your perseverance. There was absolutely no hesitation when taking on the responsibility of being your caregiver over the last three years, and I cherish every memory we have been able to make. When I walk across the stage at graduation, I know you will again be proud of my accomplishment. I love you, Dad.

Second, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Sheryl, and grandmother, Vera. I am proud to be a third-generation educator, and that would not have been possible without the love of learning my grandmother taught you, Mom, and then you taught me. My desire to pursue my doctoral degree was from the effort and dedication that you both placed into your education. Mom, you have always been my biggest cheerleader, never missing a sporting or school event, my birthdays, and always have been a phone call away. You have been detrimental to the woman I am today. I love you, Mom.

Last, I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful husband, Justin. You have supported me through this entire process and have always believed in me. When I had deadlines to meet, you took on my responsibilities so that I could work. Without your love and support, I would not have been able to complete this doctoral journey successfully. I love you so much, Justin.

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To my chair, Dr. Arbelo Marrero, thank you for showing an interest in my dissertation topic from the beginning. You have been supportive and encouraging throughout the entire process. When I wanted to give up on the doctoral journey, you were there to motivate and inspire me to continue the path that God had created for me. Your experience in the field has made this journey more enjoyable, and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with you.

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List of Abbreviations

Academically and/or Intellectually Gifted (AIG)

Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)

Cultural, Linguistically, and Economically Diverse (CLED)

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT)

Gifted and Talented (GT)

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)

Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Measure of Academic Progress (MAP)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students are educated at various academic levels at high schools across the United States. The general education curriculum offers classes at the college prep, honors, and advanced placement levels. All these programs are essential; however, most funding and attention rests with the struggling and at-risk learners at the college prep level. One group consistently overlooked at the high school level is formed of students currently enrolled in honors and advanced placement classes. A much bigger issue noted in these courses is a lack of access and representation of minority students; this disproportionate representation is often referred to as the excellence gap (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Gifted and Talented programs exist to cultivate and foster the development of the most brilliant and promising students and to provide them with a rigorous learning experience. It is vital to offer these opportunities to as many students that have the potential to succeed as possible.

Throughout the United States, Hispanics and African American students are underrepresented in Gifted and Talented programs (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) found that placement in gifted classes varies amongst different racial groups and is the lowest with African American students. This variation of school placement will harm minority students without a lack of change within school districts. When a school district does not react to demographic changes in its schools, students will experience the adverse effects, leading to a broader gap in academic achievement and school adjustment among student groups of specific socio-economic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (Min & Goff, 2016). Schools cannot implement a “one-size-fits-all” education strategy that has been traditionally used to instruct students of diverse backgrounds (Min & Goff, 2016). Students with

diverse cultural and family backgrounds have different prior knowledge and experiences; this needs to be addressed in education. School districts need to meet the needs of all students and can do this by reshaping their school programs to provide more customized and differentiated educational services for the diverse student groups (Min & Goff, 2016).

Minority students are represented at lower levels in gifted and talented classes for a variety of reasons. Income, standardized testing, cultural differences in learning, and teacher discretions have been identified as leading factors (Allen, 2017; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Ramos, 2010). Many of these factors can influence the referral process to identify students for giftedness; however, this changes once students reach the high school level. In this chapter, the historical, social, and theoretical background will be discussed and the effect it has had on the representation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes. The biases and philosophical assumptions that a researcher can bring to a study will be discussed to determine their significance on the research study, including the situation to self. In addition, the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of the study will also be reviewed. Lastly, the research questions that are grounded on the theoretical framework of the study, the problem statement, and the purpose statement will also be included in this chapter.

Background

The underrepresentation of minority students in upper-level high school classes has been an issue that originated before the desegregation of schools. Jenkins (1936) found that African American students were not identified as gifted even though their intelligence test scores identified them as such. The history of exclusion has affected minority students socially as marginalization from advanced programs limits experiences for minority students of current and

future benefits, inferior learning opportunities, and fewer educational opportunities (Clotfelter et al., 2005).

Historical

No more notable change came with improving equity amongst students in the United States than with the court case of *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education* (1954), in which the United States Supreme Court established that separate schools for African Americans and White students w unconstitutional. Equality of all students and the educational opportunities that students have access to should have been accomplished by this decision; however, this did not occur. Ford (1995) argued that gifted education programs in the United States are "the most segregated educational programs in the country" (p. 52). Instead, education programs have led to an overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs and underrepresentation in gifted and talented classes (Elhoweris et al., 2005; Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Even though many educators feel that giftedness can be found in all students, no matter their socio-economic background, race, or ethnicity (Elhoweris et al., 2005; Worrell & Dixson, 2018). With the creation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990), the education system ensured that students with disabilities would have access to a free and appropriate education. The IDEA includes gifted programs; however, minority students continued to be underrepresented (Borland, 2004). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) helped minority gifted students as it added to the research that children who perform or can perform at elevated levels exist across diverse ethnicities and socio-economic groups. Nevertheless, several barriers exist that inhibit minority students from being identified for giftedness while in school. Varied perspectives, services, and identification structures have all contributed to the lack of identification of underserved populations, especially for those who

might not have received the background knowledge and academic skills necessary to display or perform as a gifted child (Siegle et al., 2016). All of these barriers continue to create a major problem with equal access to gifted education.

Social

Educators and policymakers feel that underserved students are at greater risk of being overlooked for gifted programs due to various issues (Henfield et al., 2016). One problem that underrepresented students face is that minority students tend to experience difficulties in White educational spaces (Webb & Linn, 2016). Culturally, many minority students cannot connect with their White teachers or their culturally different classmates. Including a multicultural curriculum in all classes can help make minority students feel more accepted in their classrooms and education. Diversifying the teacher workforce to recruit minority teachers has been found to be beneficial. Minority students who meet teachers of color will look at them as role models and have a learning environment that enhances minority students' success (Morgan, 2019). Besides, all students will receive help from a more multicultural approach to their curriculum (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). The underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes creates social issues (Morgan, 2019). It then creates an overpopulation of minority students in lower-level classes, which then limits the educational and economic opportunities for minority students later in life (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017).

Theoretical

The theoretical conceptions of giftedness of Gagné (1985) and Renzulli (1978) both contribute to the issues that can be present with unequal representation of minority students in gifted programs. Gagné's (1985) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent describes the

qualifications of students. Giftedness is the use of untrained natural abilities, while talent relates to the mastery of developed skills (Gagné, 1985). Both giftedness and talent will place students in the top 10% of their same-aged peers (Gagné, 1985). Gagné (1985) presented four aptitude domains: intellectual, creative socio-affective, sensorimotor, and sensorimotor. These aptitude domains will be presented in all gifted students' tasks in their schooling (Gagné, 1985). Renzulli (1978) argues that giftedness occurs when there is interaction in three main clusters: above-average abilities, elevated levels of task commitment, and high creativity levels. Gifted students will be able to apply these traits in every level of human performance (Renzulli, 1978).

Critical theorists have critiqued schools' tracking of students and its relationship that replicates societal patterns of race and class stratification (Bernhardt, 2014a). Bernhardt (2014a) describes tracking as "any practice of sorting students into classes for instructional purposes" (p. 3). Apple (2004) and Bowles and Gintis (2011) relate class tracking to a sorting mechanism at the schools and keep social class structure to help the economic elite. The reproduction theory has also been used to discuss this issue, as it believes that schools are created and designed around hierarchies of power (Bernhardt, 2014a; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). The reproduction theory recognizes the "hierarchical structure of schooling and its tendency to mirror the top-down structure of the labor market which aids in the reproduction of social inequality (Jennings & Lynn, 2005). This structure inhibits those previously marginalized by society and provides advantages for those children that families are in positions of advantage (Swartz, 1997). Swartz (1997) describes these advantages as access to culturally valued resources, knowledge, and experiences. Bernhardt (2014a) confirms that these advantages and those with access to them are in higher positions of social, political, and economic advantage.

Situation to Self

I have been a teacher for 19 years, and I am dually certified in Social Studies and Special Education with endorsements in Gifted and Talented Education and AP Human Geography. The first 11 years of my career were spent in the special education classroom teaching classes across all subject areas and interacting with students with emotional and learning disabilities in self-contained classes and higher functioning students in inclusion and resource classes. I have taught college prep, honors, and AP-level social studies classes to 9th graders in the last seven years. While teaching all levels of 9th-grade social studies classes, I have seen the disparity between minority groups in higher-level classes at the high school.

When conducting a qualitative study, several philosophical assumptions are the guiding philosophies behind research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions can all lead to future implications in the research. An ontological assumption relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When conducting qualitative research, the different realities that the researcher and individuals being studied are embraced and research is conducted with the intent of reporting the multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I will be exploring evidence from different individuals' perspectives and experiences from different schools within a district. By including multiple forms of evidence in themes and using the actual words of the individuals that I have interviewed, I will be able to present the different realities and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An ontological assumption embraces multiple realities, and I will carry this out by reporting teachers' perspectives and experiences. An epistemological assumption focuses on people's subjective experiences and therefore relies on the researcher getting as close to the participants being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To do this, I must conduct research in the

field where participants work and live. I will be conducting my research in the community that I live in and have worked in. As a researcher, I will try to reduce the distance between myself and the participants for as long as possible to collect the participants' "subjective experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). In this study, I will be researching at the schools, when possible, to experience what the participants are experiencing throughout the process. I have seen firsthand the underrepresentation of minority students in the higher-level classes, so it is important for me to conduct research and get to know the participants and what their experiences are with this issue. An axiological assumption requires the researcher to make known values and biases on the information being gathered from the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have included my gender, age, race, individual experiences, and political and professional beliefs in this study to make my values known and my position compared to the context and setting of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21).

A transformative worldview was used to guide this study. A transformative framework is beneficial when advocating action to help a person or group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is based on the main tenet that knowledge is not distributed equally, and it, therefore, can affect the "power and social relationships" in a society (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.25). The purpose of this framework was to aid these specific groups of people to improve society. By using this framework, the study focused on the changes needed for minority students to be equally represented within advanced placement and honors-level high school classes,

Problem Statement

The problem is there is an underrepresentation of minority students in honors and advanced placement classes at the high school level (Ford et al., 2020; Giersch, 2018; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Kolluri, 2018; Morgan, 2019; Novak & Jones, 2021; Williams-Hurt, 2018;

Worrell & Dixson, 2018; Worrell et al., 2019). Minority students, compared to their White peers, are underrepresented in gifted programs. Data from the Office for Civil Rights (2015) reported that across the United States, the representation in gifted education is inequitable, with African Americans making up 15.4% of the country's total school population and only 8.5% represented in gifted programs and Hispanic students counting for 25.8% of the total school population with 18.1% in gifted programs. Students that take part in the advanced placement and honors-level classes at high school experience learning in a complex, advanced, and meaningful environment in which a knowledgeable teacher provides instruction through a high-quality curriculum and instruction (Siegle et al., 2016). Students that take part in these classes typically tend to be more successful in college admissions, scholarships, meet college grade point average requirements, and are more likely to complete college (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). However, minority students do not take part in these programs at equal rates as White students. White students enrolled in advanced and gifted programs benefit disproportionately from their minority peers as they transition from high school to college. The barriers that exist for minority students to take part in these gifted programs need to be broken down to allow all students to excel and to diminish the achievement gap that can be experienced between different ethnic groups. High schools should develop elevated levels of talent across all ethnic groups to provide equitable education (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017).

The procedures for identifying giftedness in elementary and middle schools across the country are consistent. Students are referred for giftedness testing by teachers or parents and then tested for giftedness using a variety of standardized tests. This referral process then determines academic placement in their classes. Research focuses mainly on identification at the elementary level and why there is an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs (Ford,

2015). Once students enter high school, the procedure differs from school to school, district to district, and state to state (Bernhardt, 2014a; Cesario, 2006; Watanabe, 2007). Many schools have implemented an inclusive open course enrollment policy to dismantle academic segregation, however, there is still an underrepresentation of minority students in honors-level and advanced placement classes (Bernhardt, 2018). Open course enrollment requires that academic placement in honors-level and advanced placement classes is based on teacher recommendation, parent request, and parent-override of their recommended courses in addition to gifted identification (Bernhardt, 2018). Research is limited when analyzing the course placement process and recommended academic placement of students at the high school level. There is also a lack of research on the role of teachers in recommending students for advanced placement and honors-level classes.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this embedded multiple-case study was to explore the process and experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level classes at three high schools in a school district in the Low Country of South Carolina. This school district has a diverse student population and has a student enrollment of 26,301 (Office of Civil Rights, 2017). Minority students are represented at 44.6% of the student population in the district and are classified as American Indian or Alaska Native (0.6%), Asian (2.0%), Black or African American (31.2%), Hispanic or Latino of any race (7.6%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0.4%), and two or more races (3.0%) (Office of Civil Rights, 2017). Minority students will be generally defined as students from a non-Caucasian ethnicity, focusing on Hispanic and African American students. The theory guiding this study was the invitational theory (Purkey & Novak, 2008). This theory is grounded on the idea that learning is enhanced

when learners are positively encouraged or "invited" into the educational experience (Haigh, 2011, p. 299). Most students who take part in the advanced placement and honors-level classes experience learning in a complex, advanced, and meaningful environment in which a knowledgeable teacher provides instruction through high-quality curriculum and instruction (Siegle et al., 2016). Students that take part in these classes typically tend to be more successful in college admissions, scholarships, meet college grade point average requirements, and are more likely to complete college (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). However, minority students do not take part in gifted education programs at equal rates as White students. White students enrolled in advanced and gifted programs benefit disproportionately as they transition from high school to college than their minority peers. To provide an equitable opportunity for minority students to take part in these courses, understanding the barriers that exist which prevent their participation is important. The phenomena focused on the idea that learning is enhanced when encouraged to take part or invited into an educational experience (Purkey & Novak, 2008). The theory has four main principles: respect for people and their differences, the trust expressed through cooperation and a sense of community, optimism about the untapped potential within each learner, and intentionality (Purkey & Novak, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was assessed using empirical, theoretical, and practical perspectives. Addressing the importance of the teacher recommendation process and the effect that it can have on students and the classes that they take in high school and their future endeavors. It was imperative to explore the significance of the teacher recommendation process and its influence on the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors level classes.

Empirical Significance

Most students that take part in the advanced placement and honors-level classes experience learning in a complex, advanced, and meaningful environment in which a knowledgeable teacher provides instruction through high-quality curriculum and instruction (Siegle et al., 2016). Students that participate in these classes typically tend to be more successful in college admissions, scholarships, college grade point averages, and college completion rates (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). However, minority students do not participate in these programs at equal rates as White students. White students enrolled in advanced and gifted programs benefit disproportionately as they transition from high school to college than their minority peers. The barriers created for minority students to not participate in these classes need to be broken down to allow all students to excel and diminish the achievement gap that can be experienced between different ethnic groups.

Theoretical Significance

The theory guiding this qualitative study is the invitational theory by Purkey (1978). The invitational theory is focused on the phenomenon that learning is enhanced when people are encouraged to participate or invited into an educational experience (Purkey & Novak, 1996). This theory is important when guiding this study as it focuses the research on the importance of including minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes. Teachers are the gatekeepers of these classes at the high school level as they recommend classes for students to take. Using Purkey's theory (1978), researchers will better understand the significance of the teacher recommendation process and the impact that it can have on the number of minority students that are enrolled in higher-level high school classes. The recommendation process at the high school level can now invite a greater range of students to participate in the higher-level

classes. The theoretical significance will also affect researchers understanding of the importance of inviting more minority students into these classes and the significance it will have on students' lives as they will be taking part in more rigorous classes but will also allow these students to feel accepted in these classes.

Practical Significance

As schools continue to become more diverse, schools must develop elevated levels of talent among all different ethnic groups to provide equitable education (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). By exploring teacher experiences with the recommendation process for honors and advanced placement classes at the high school level, educators will be enabled to reflect on whether the current procedures are proper when evaluating minority students. This can also shed light on schools' requirements to place students and the equity of these procedures. As this is an issue that is experienced at the three high schools in Campbell School District, it is significant to explore the process that teachers use to recommend students for advanced placement and honors-level classes to ensure that all students are being educated at the proper level, which will help them for future success.

Research Questions

Qualitative studies use terms such as explain, explore, describe, and understand (Schoch, 2020). Focusing on "how" and "why" questions allow the tracing of a process over a certain amount of time instead of frequencies or incidences (Yin, 2018). The research question's focus addressed what the case study was truly about (Schoch, 2020). This study was centered upon a central question and three sub-questions, which are:

Central Research Question: How do teachers describe the recommendation process for academic placement at the high school?

The teacher recommendation process is a vital part when deciding the placement for students for future classes. Teacher decision-making is context-specific and can be interpreted in many ways (Bernhardt, 2018). Exploring the process of teacher recommendations, student course placement, and academic tracking is important to understand why there is an underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes (Bernhardt, 2018).

Sub-Question One: What practices are used to recommend students for honors and advanced placement level classes at the high school?

It was important to address the reasons why there is a lack of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school level. Much of the literature explains that this is due to standardized testing and screening, cultural differences, teacher perceptions, and recommendations. Teacher identification is a key part as they are the first to meet students and their academic ability. However, using only IQ (Intelligence Quotient) scores to identify giftedness can increase the discrepancy of the ethnic make-up of gifted classrooms (Hodges et al., 2018). Identifying the process in which students are found to move into honors and advanced placement class was important because it differs from school to school. There is a lack of research on this topic as it is so fluid, but it is necessary to investigate to help identify minority students that may qualify for these courses.

Sub-Question Two: What are the best practices to encourage students to participate in higher-level classes at the high school?

There are a variety of obstacles that students meet, which may prevent them from participating in the gifted track in elementary and middle school. However, at the high school level, with parent input and teacher recommendations, these obstacles can change. There is a

lack of research at the high school level as to why students are not opting to take advanced placement and honors-level classes and why those who are enrolled in these courses do not remain enrolled. There are a variety of strategies that schools can implement to increase the number of minority students that enroll in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. Improving the recruitment and identification of minority students at a younger age is one key strategy and implementing more holistic evaluations of students is another (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Teacher training is another important aspect of this topic that may support the increase of minority students in honors and advanced placement classes. Many teachers are not taught to specifically identify giftedness in minority students and are not up to date on the new techniques that can be used to carry out this (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017).

Sub-Question Three: What are the practices of collaboration and communication that take place with colleagues, school counselors, students, and parents during the recommendation process?

According to Bernhardt (2018b), the recommendation process is not always addressed in department meetings or professional development meetings to help teachers. This results in a lack of communication between colleagues which can lead to making recommendations in isolation with no collaboration (Bernhardt, 2018). Bernhardt (2018) also addressed the information gap that can exist between advanced-level teachers and on-level teachers. Many times, discussions do not occur between the two separate groups of teachers. This lack of collaboration leads to a lack of knowledge by teachers to understand what is needed for students to be successful in the higher-level classes (Bernhardt, 2018). There are times where within their own department, teachers do not know or fully understand the “curriculum, expectations, or academic demands” for the classes that they are recommending students for (Bernhardt, 2018 p.79). Communication and collaboration are both important components of the recommendation

process between educators, colleagues, school counselors, parents, and teachers and all parties should be involved to increase representation of minority students in higher-level classes.

Definitions

1. *Advanced placement classes*– Classes that are designed to engage "superior" high school students with work aligned to university curricula (Kolluri, 2018).
2. *CLD students* – Student's representative of diverse cultural and ethnic groups, specifically those with native language backgrounds other than English (Allen, 2017).
3. *Giftedness* – Individuals who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains (Hodges et al., 2018).
4. *Honors-level classes* – Advanced high school coursework; exclusive of advanced placement and international baccalaureate (Hart, 2020).
5. *Minority students* – Black, Hispanic, and Native American students (Hodges et al., 2018).
6. *Multicultural education* – An educational reform movement designed to change the total educational environment so that students from diverse racial and ethnic groups, both genders, exceptional students, and students from each social-class group will experience equal educational opportunities in schools, colleges, and universities (Banks, 1993).
7. *Referral* – A process by which parents or teachers recommend students for screening or testing for gifted services (Lakin, 2016).
8. *Screening* – The use of a formal assessment tool (whether a rating scale or an ability or achievement test) for making placement decisions and/or identifying necessary services for the student (McBee, 2006).

Summary

Historically, there has been an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted classes. It is important to explore this problem because students of all ethnic backgrounds should be equally challenged in their education and be provided with the same opportunities to excel academically. There are a variety of present issues that contribute to the lack of identification of minority students for gifted programs when they are younger. However, there is a lack of research that examines why students are not enrolling in classes when they can decide to enroll voluntarily. Teachers play a significant role in the identification of gifted students in the early grades but also can recommend students for advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school level. However, there is still an underrepresentation of minority students. It is also important to explore the patterns that minority students and if recommended, whether they are enrolling in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. The purpose of this case study was to explore the process in which students are enrolled in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes and why there is an underrepresentation of minority students in these classes for teachers at three high schools found in one district in the Low Country of South Carolina.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was be conducted to explore the problem of the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school level. This chapter will present a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the invitational theory will be discussed. This theory is relevant to the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school level. It is followed by the discussion of important influential theories related to the topic, a synthesis of recent literature about minority representation in gifted and talented education classes and enhancing gifted education for underrepresented students. Minority representation in gifted and talented education classes is affected by standardized testing and screening, tracking, cultural differences in the classroom, teacher discretion, and recommendations in the referral process. Enhancing gifted education for underrepresented students requires recruiting, identifying, and keeping students, implementing a multicultural education curriculum, talent development with minority students, and teacher training. Lastly, a gap in the literature is identified, representing a likely need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theory upon which this study was based is the invitational theory. The invitational theory (1978) was introduced by several scholars and researchers and argues that learning is enhanced and achieved when students are encouraged and invited to participate in an educational setting (Haigh, 2011; Novak et al., 2014; Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Siegel, 2013). Schmidt (2004) stresses that the “theory advocates for different educational programs and services that focus on human relationships, improved

physical environments, and respectful systems in which all people, regardless of culture, ethnicity, sex, gender, or other diversity factors can thrive" (p. 28). For educators to implement the invitational theory, they must adhere to the four basic assumptions or the fundamental beliefs of the theory:

a) Everyone would like to be accepted and considered valuable, capable, and responsible, and would like to be treated as such,
b) Everyone has the potential to create "beneficial messages," and because they can do that, they have the responsibility to do so for themselves and others,
c) Everyone has "untapped potential in all areas of learning and human development,"
d) Capitalize on human potential creative programs, policies, and processes need to be created to "invite" optimal development (Schmidt, 2004, p. 28; Shaw & Siegel, 2010, p. 108).

It is important to view people with the understanding that they can perform various skills, be treated as valuable, and that people have untapped potential in all areas of human endeavors (Purkey & Novak, 2015). This untapped potential can be realized in various settings, especially when programs and policies are designed and developed to intentionally invite individuals, whether personally or professionally (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Schmidt (2004) argues that when programs and policies "neglect or ignore cultural or individual differences," culturally diverse students are disinvited and separated from the rest of the student population. Therefore, the theory embraced beliefs and practices that are compatible with multicultural approaches (Schmidt, 2004). The theory also stresses that the education process should be a collaborative and cooperative process. Teachers, students, parents, school counselors, and administrators are all a part of the educational experience, and the theory strives for the total involvement of all

stakeholders (Purkey & Novak, 2015; Schmidt, 2007). These assumptions are needed to move towards constructing a positive learning environment (Haigh, 2011).

Shaw and Siegel (2010) discussed five values important to the invitational theory. Optimism, trust, respect, care, and intentionality are all linked to the basic assumptions. Intentionality is the value in which the other four values use a vehicle to propel them to be applied to the theory (Shaw & Siegel, 2010). Intentionality and an invitation are both critical components of the invitational theory. Purkey and Schmidt (1990) discussed four different invitational levels: intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting. The four levels are used to create motivational learning opportunities and detect and eliminate demotivational learning experiences (Haigh, 2011). Demotivation is a crucial component of intentionally and unintentionally disinviting students.

Intentionally disinviting students can include activities that discourage, demean, discriminate against students by focusing on their shortcomings, and undermining learners' confidence (Haigh, 2011; Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Unintentionally disinviting students is typically target-driven and has good intentions by following policies and procedures. This can be seen as a lack of confidence in learners that are being disinvited (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Haigh (2011) describes this process as one that creates stress on the learner by overloading on "disrespect, distrust, insecurity, and pessimism" with a lack of concern for the learner (p. 302). Schmidt (2004) builds on Haigh's explanation and argues that misconceptions of cultural differences and stereotypic views of diverse characteristics also fall into this category. Although not intentional, ill-timed, careless, or misguided behaviors can sometimes be misinterpreted by people of diverse backgrounds (Schmidt, 2004). Unintentional inviting appears just by chance; although supportive of student achievement, there is no conscious effort to invite students into

educational activities (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Haigh (2011) and Schmidt (2004) stress that unintentional inviting does not lead to continuous maintenance or development of relationships with students and their learning and is especially clear with culturally diverse students. Intentionally inviting students to academic opportunities, educators seek to empower, engage, and energize students and encourage them to work to their potential (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Whether intentional or not, disinviting students is the current trend that minority students are faced with when evaluating advanced placement and honors-level high school classes.

Schmidt (2007) and then Moeller et al. (2012) have argued that six elements of diversity should be included in invitational practices with diverse populations. In addition to the invitational theory, "empowerment, encouragement, enlistment, enjoyment, equity, and expectation" can all be utilized by educators to assess relationships and organizations in terms of "accepting, embracing, and celebrating diversity" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 17). Equity can be evaluated using the existing structure of the invitational theory and is meant to ensure that everyone has access to participate in programs implemented by schools (Moeller et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007). Equity can be used to question school programs and whether students have equal opportunity to participate in programs at the school (Moeller et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007). Expectations ultimately limit or expand relationships in an educational setting. Lower expectations for students due to their "socioeconomic background, ethnic heritage or family history" will unlikely lead to a beneficial relationship with that student (Schmidt, 2007, p. 18). However, if elevated expectations are used for all students and developmental situations for those students, it will increase their success (Schmidt, 2007). Schmidt (2007) and Moeller et al. (2012) stress that schools that embrace invitational theory will use enlistment to strive for the total involvement of all students.

Schools should be analyzing their policies and programs to evaluate their level of enlistment and increase the number of diverse students involved in honors-level and advanced placement classes (Schmidt, 2007). Empowerment fosters nurturing and helpful relationships in schools and helps combat "oppression, negate marginalization, and elevate the elements of equity and enlistment" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 19). Purkey and Novak (1996) explained that often, schools and other organizations unintentionally discriminate, degrade, and dehumanize groups by continuing to use traditional or outmoded policies and programs. Empowerment can be reached when schools consistently apply "equitable practices, appropriate expectations, genuine enlistment strategies, and encouragement" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 20). Encouragement is a big piece of the invitational theory as it incorporates the philosophy of "being with versus doing to" (Moeller et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007, p. 20). The last part to include is enjoyment. Including people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, religious beliefs, and ethnicity provides opportunities to all students and ultimately enriches their experiences and helps develop their lives (Moeller et al., 2012).

The invitational theory correlated to this research study and the underrepresentation of minority students in high-level high school classes related to the responsibility that teachers have in the recommendation process. This theory promotes helping teachers achieve empathy and deal more with human relationships and aims to have teachers help all students achieve their full potential in a school that finds diversity normal (Haigh, 2011). Teachers can "invite" minority students into honors and advanced placement classes, which can decrease the discrepancy between the enrollment of minority students in public education and the number of minority students enrolled in advanced placement and honors-level classes. By intentionally inviting minority students into these classes, each student will be invited to develop physically,

intellectually, and emotionally (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

Teaching invitation levels to educators within a cultural context will aid them in making decisions that will provide positive direction to diverse students (Schmidt, 2004). The invitational theory (1978) provides a framework for the study that focuses on the inclusion of students and the untapped potential that many students have but cannot show due to a lack of opportunities to be included in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. As teacher recommendations are the most often used resource for identifying students for gifted classes, it is essential to understand the process (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). The invitational theory (1978) will be used to help create the research questions for this study as the recommendation process for academic placement is evaluated. The data that will be collected and analyzed from this study will help determine the level of the invitation and inclusion of students, specifically minority students in higher-level high school classes. Exploring the teacher recommendation process and the experiences that teachers have had with the process, will help provide an understanding of how educators can increase the amount of minority students that can be included in honors and advanced placement classes and ultimately add to the invitational theory.

Related Literature

The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs is a topic that has been heavily researched as it has been an issue in Gifted and Talented Education programs (Card & Giuliano, 2016). Participation in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes can lead to a higher grade-point average (GPA) for students and can be used as an indicator of college readiness and enrollment (Bernhardt, 2018). Research has been conducted on a variety of causes for the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted classes. Overall, the

underrepresentation of minority students can be attributed to standardized testing, tracking, cultural differences in learning, and teacher discretion (Bernhardt, 2018; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Hodges et al., 2018**;** Peters & Engerrand, 2016). To improve the number of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes, it is also important to look at the research on recruitment and identification, multicultural education curriculum, academic tracking, talent development, and teacher training to enhance enrollment (Banks, 1999; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Russell, 2018; Siegle et al., 2016).

Minority Representation in Gifted and Talented Education Classes

Minority students, compared to their White peers, are underrepresented in gifted programs and are a concern to educators in the field of gifted education (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Data from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education found that in 2009, African American students make up 16.7% of the student population in the United States (Grissom & Redding, 2016). However, only 9.8% of the students are in gifted programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Peters et al. (2019a) argue that there is an inequality of educational access and opportunity in the United States as higher-income families have greater access to high-quality educational opportunities. Olszewski and Corwith (2018) agree that income is one of the most powerful influences on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and talented classrooms. Besides disparities in income accessibility and opportunity, several other reasons must be considered to understand why this occurs. Standardized testing, tracking, cultural differences in learning, and teacher discretion can be found as leading factors of discretion (Bernhardt, 2018; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Hodges et al., 2018**;** Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Standardized Testing and Screening

Students are typically identified for gifted and talented services by conducting standardized tests and teacher recommendations. In schools across the United States, the identification process includes students taking a standardized test. Student scores are then compared to national scores, and they must be above a cutoff point on the tests to be selected for gifted programming (Hodges et al., 2018). The high cutoff scores that are needed for students to be tested into gifted programs leads to differences between Black, Hispanic, and Native American students and their peers; the excellence gap continues to widen, which makes proportional representation more difficult to achieve (Hodges et al., 2018). Many minority students are at a disadvantage when taking these standardized tests as many are written with a White middle-class bias (Ramos, 2010). Peters and Engerrand (2016) explain that minority and low-income students receive lower scores on academic achievement tests than their White peers. Traditional intelligence tests, such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, have yielded lower scores for minority students (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Lower scores have also been true for minority students on the Cognitive Abilities Test-Nonverbal subscale (CogAT-NV) and the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test (NNAT), with scores reported at one-half to one standard deviation lower than their White peers (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Williams-Hurt (2018) explained that although the CogAt test is considered “bias-free,” it favors students who have had more academic enrichment and more life experiences typical of students of privilege.

Full-scale IQ scores (FSIQ’s) have been used to identify students for gifted and talented programs. As these tests are most often used to identify giftedness, there is no surprise that there is an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs (Luria et al., 2016). Luria et al. (2016) explain that it is common for FSIQs to dominate screening and the identification process. However, many test developers caution against this as it does not evaluate a student’s ability or

potential. Luria et al. (2016) and Hodges et al. (2018) argue that simply using FSIQ scores only has increased the discrepancy between White and minority students. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, who might not have the opportunities to develop their gifted potential, are less likely to be identified or served (Hodges et al., 2018). In addition, simply using an IQ test also does not include the change in the definition of giftedness to include gifted potential and talent development, nor does it consider the creativity of students (Hodges et al., 2018; Luria et al., 2016).

In addition to IQ tests, many states use state-mandated tests for labeling students as gifted (Luria et al., 2016). State-mandated tests assess if students have mastered the material being taught throughout the school year and often alerts school staff to send their names for a gifted evaluation (Luria et al., 2016). Tests are given annually, beginning in third grade, and typically look at students exceeding the 80th percentile on the tests for giftedness (Luria et al., 2016). Steele and Aronson (1995) argue that state-mandated testing also has a potential bias, but there is also a stereotype threat present along ethnic and gender lines. Schmader and Johns (2003) agree that when students worry about a negative stereotype, they will in turn experience stress and anxiety, which can reduce their working memory and ultimately lead to low performance on the tests. A typical result of stereotype threats is the underperformance of African American and minority students on intelligence and achievement tests (Luria et al., 2016).

Peters et al. (2019b) discussed the use of aggregate numbers, enrollment compared to a base rate, and the conditional probability of identification. Utilizing an aggregate number corresponds to the cutoff scores discussed by Hodges et al. (2018), in which many minority students will not be identified as gifted and will result in “aggregate racial disparities” (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019b). Enrollment compared to a base rate reports the proportion of

students identified from each ethnic group compared to their proportion in the overall student population (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). Base rate is most often used in studies reporting disproportionality in special education services and school discipline (Morgan et al., 2017; Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). Peters, Gentry, et al. (2019) found when analyzing base rate that African American and Hispanic students were referred at rates of 57% and 70% respectively of the student population, while Asian American and European Americans were referred at rates of 1% and 118%, respectively. The third way recommended to evaluate the disproportionality of students being identified by Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al. (2019) is to look at relevant background factors. These factors can include reading and mathematics achievement, student demographics, school, and district socioeconomic status, school and district achievement, and the number of students identified as gifted in the school and district (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). Hamilton et al. (2018) and Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al. (2019) both argue that besides lower group mean scores that can lead to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, there are also several other factors that need to be considered, such as the role of teachers in the referral and screening process.

Teacher Perception and Recommendations

Teacher recommendations are another significant part of the referral process for the identification of gifted students. McBee (2006) describes the process required by most schools is first to receive a referral from a teacher before any formal testing can be conducted. Lakin (2016) defines a referral as “a process by which parents or teachers recommend students for screening” (p.140). Teacher referrals can vary between schools, districts, and states in their formality and can be as simplistic as a teacher recommendation or student responses on a formal teacher-rating instrument (McBee et al., 2016). These referrals provide a picture of how a student performs in

the classroom, which a test does not illustrate (Siegle et al., 2010). The discretion used by teachers could be considered misleading to some extent, as many regular education teachers are not well versed in what constitutes a gifted and talented student, as they have had minimal training.

Novak and Jones (2021) explain that gifted education is not part of the undergraduate curriculum in most teaching programs. Per the National Association for Gifted Programs (2014), only three states require regular education teachers to have the training to instruct gifted children. In addition, most districts do not offer any professional development opportunities to teachers that aid them with identifying gifted characteristics in their students, even though it is highly recommended by gifted researchers and practitioners (Lewis & Novak, 2019). Siegle et al. (2010) argue that training in gifted education does occur; however, it typically occurs via-school led professional development. This type of professional development can create issues as the different schools may define giftedness differently, which can lead to confusion for teachers who then must identify giftedness amongst their students (Siegle et al., 2010). Either way, teachers are considered the gatekeepers of gifted referrals (Novak & Jones, 2021). In elementary schools, teachers are asked to refer a list of students they see as potentially gifted; therefore, they make judgments on students who should be referred for testing (Novak & Jones, 2021). Therefore, teachers serve as gatekeepers to gifted programs and can either create a barrier or an entry point (Novak & Jones, 2021).

Brown et al. (2005) argue that teachers' experience level can also play a role in gifted identification. Experienced teachers will look more for various skills, including individual expression and contextual variables when identifying students (Russell, 2018). Schroth and Helfer (2009) mimic this belief, as they found that experienced teachers will use and expand the

definition of giftedness, when identifying students. Russell (2018) introduced three categories that relate to teacher perceptions of giftedness. These categories include assumptions, attitudes, and practices. Carmen (2011) found that less experienced teachers held stereotypical assumptions of gifted learners related to gender, ethnicity, age, various talents, and nerdiness. Stereotypical assumptions can be related to their lack of experience and training in gifted education (Carmen, 2011; Russell, 2018). Teacher experience has also been found to be a factor in gifted identification, as experienced teachers tend to favor the use of "individual expression, ongoing assessment, multiple identification criteria, and contextual variables" when evaluating students for gifted services (Russell, 2018, p. 279). Russell (2018) found that experienced teachers were also more open to an expanded definition of giftedness and believed that IQ testing alone is not always practical when identifying giftedness in students who were "culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse" (p. 279).

Minority students can be disadvantaged if teachers hold lower expectations for them or do not recognize their giftedness (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Although infrequent, teacher perceptions of minority students can also be influenced by a student's race or ethnicity and could lead to unequal treatment of different students (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Earlier studies have shown that some teachers have negative stereotypes and perceptions of the students' ability from diverse cultural backgrounds (Elhoweris et al., 2005). When evaluating teacher referrals for giftedness, studies also found that teachers tend to evaluate African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and poor students' academic performance and behavior negatively (Elhoweris et al., 2005). This process of generalizing about minority students based on their race and or ethnicity is known as deficit thinking (Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005). Peters et al. (2019a) stressed that using teacher recommendations before any other data point could also

disproportionately affect minority students, as African American students were more likely to be identified as gifted if they had a teacher that was also African American.

Morgan (2019) found that not having teachers of color reduces minority students' opportunities of being identified and placed in gifted classes. Russell (2018) agrees with Peters et al. (2019b) and Morgan (2019) but argues that experienced White teachers are aware of what minority students can experience outside-of-school and consider that for placement. However, the variables that occur inside the school are not considered and more relatable to minority teachers. Crawford, et al. (2020) and Morgan (2019) agree that minority teachers' will have higher expectations of their African American students, which is important as lower expectations are significantly associated with the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Minority teachers are also more likely to "refer minority students for gifted programming, address racism in the classroom, and build stronger relationships with students from similar racial or ethnic backgrounds" (Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020, p. 53). Racially diverse teachers can also help underrepresented students navigate the gifted identification process and serve as a support system at the school (Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020). English Language Learners also experience a lack of teacher referrals as they may have difficulty communicating their learning in a way that is valued and recognized by many educators (Allen, 2017).

Cultural Differences

Besides teacher nominations and standardized testing, students can be identified for gifted services through parental nominations. Crawford, Snyder, et al. (2020) and Yosso (2005) both argue that this process is dependent on the students' contact at school that can provide information to them and their parents' skills for maneuvering educational programs. For minority students, this can create an issue, especially if their parents do not speak English. It is expected

that an educated parent from the middle-class will advocate for their students to receive gifted services if needed. However, it is unlikely that a "disenfranchised, low socioeconomic status, uneducated, or an ethnic minority, would have the nerve or the understanding" to question authority and fight for their child to be tested or referred for services (Gonzalez et al., 2000; Ramos, 2010, p. 152). Alexander and Schnick (2008) and Gentry et al. (2008) agree with Ramos (2010) that parents who speak English as a second language find it challenging to communicate with teachers, and schools and the achievement of these parents also adds to the discrimination of these students from being identified as gifted.

Most parents hope to be a source of encouragement for their children. However, parents of minority students might feel that their children do not belong with their gifted peers, that they will not be successful in the gifted classroom, or that they will not be provided with accurate information to help support their children (Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005). Lack of information and a sense of not belonging can in turn effect a student's academic achievement as well. To help support minority students, Milner and Ford (2007) argue that minority students need to "encounter and experience curriculum and instruction" that focuses on different point of views, different life experiences, and it must include contributions of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups (p. 167). Milner and Ford (2007) stress that the family unit is one of the most critical components for understanding minority gifted students and must be supported throughout the parent-referral process.

Many educators find that with minority students, their cultures can prevent them from demonstrating the identifiers used for gifted and talented. Diverse cultures, such as Latinos do not draw attention to themselves, so students do not stand out as much as other children (Ramos, 2010). Siegle et al. (2016) and Wintergerst et al. (2003) argued that diverse cultures also place

more emphasis on the group instead of individual performance. Hence, they prefer working in groups and therefore do not stand out and excelling. This type of learning behavior could inhibit them from demonstrating their giftedness in classroom activities such as group discussions and debates (Ramos, 2010). Diverse cultural styles are learned at an early age, and as a student grows within that cultural style, they will respond to new situations based on those past life experiences (Milner & Ford, 2007). In an education setting, minority students may communicate and understand information differently than other students (Milner & Ford, 2007). Crawford, Snyder, et al. (2020) argue that the relationships between students and teachers can be strained due to the deficits in cultural understanding.

Positive and negative life experiences are experienced differently amongst the diverse cultures in the United States. Some demographic groups experience few, if any, negative experiences while others have many adverse childhood experiences (ACE) (Peters, 2021). Others have every positive learning opportunity, while others are exposed to multiple negative experiences. One of the most significant negative experiences that a student can have is living in poverty. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), one out of every five American children lived in poverty and large ethnic/racial differences in poverty. Peters (2021) reported that in 2016, one out of every three Black or Native American children live in poverty, and 28% of Hispanic children live in poverty. Poverty has a significant effect on human development and unequal rates of poverty can lead to achievement gaps (Peters, 2021). Kelly (2020) adds to Peter's (2021) findings and found that the most direct way that poverty can affect children is through the neighborhoods that they live in, as these neighborhoods will not attend well-funded schools. ACEs are a type of negative life experience that can occur to children and can be linked to mental health issues, substance abuse, and negative educational outcomes

(Peters, 2021). Merrick et al. (2018) and Peters (2021) both found that compared to their White peers, Black and Hispanic children experienced higher rates of sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, parental separation or divorce, and incarcerated household members.

The most considerable life experience that is reported is parental expenditures on education. Before children begin attending schools, most of their education comes from what their parents can provide. Kornrich (2016) found that some children are born into homes with an abundance of resources and are immersed in education for the first four years of their lives; while others have had fewer opportunities due to it costing money or it is not available in their communities. Peters (2021) explained that with the various levels of formal education from birth to children entering school, can lead to a wide range of students' achievement levels, which are difficult to close. Peters and Engerrand (2016) reported that some students have "twice as much education" when they enter school, which leads to vast differences in "quality and quantity" of educational opportunities (p. 161). Anderson (2013) found some cases where parents were spending thousands of dollars on test preparations to score higher on tests used for admission to the gifted programs in New York City. Increased parental expenditures on education, therefore can lead to additional educational opportunities.

Academic Tracking

Academic tracking is a frequent practice that has been implemented in schools across America. Tracking can be defined as grouping students based on their academic ability into classes that are less diverse to meet the student's needs (Conway, 2019). Tracking consists of student classroom placement, teacher assignment, and curriculum access based on a criterion of presumed ability and prior achievement from achievement test scores, teacher observations, and classroom performance (Beard, 2019). Before the 1970s, tracking was used to place students in

programs that prepared them for career opportunities or post-secondary schools (Bernhardt, 2018). Following the civil rights movement, class tracking took on another form and became less standardized and involved flexible practices (Lucas, 1999). Giersch (2018), Beard (2019), and Legette (2018) all agree that over time, tracks transformed to stand for academic difficulty which and can be seen in elementary schools as standard instructional levels and at the secondary level, high-ability groups based on student strengths.

There are a variety of adverse effects from tracking, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience them the most. Beard (2019) reveals that the achievement gap between high and low-track students is even more significant than the gap between students who do not graduate and high school graduates. Conway (2019) found that this is due to the decrease in the low and middle ability students' learning instead of the high ability students increasing their scores. Low-track classrooms typically have less qualified staff, are less rigorous, and focuses on rote skills and procedures (Conway, 2019). Beard (2019) and Giersch (2018) both agree with Conway (2019) and added that lower-track students moved more slowly through the curriculum and that the quality of instruction was lower in their classes. Giersch (2018) adds that teachers tend to have fewer resources, present inferior instruction, and lower expectations of their students' while students tend to have less interest in school.

The different tracks that students are placed in can result in the rationing of high-quality education form a hierarchy in high schools and distribute knowledge and cultural resources to specific students, separating them from their peers (Apple, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Oakes, 1987). Mickelson and Everett (2008) argue that tracking has created and continued the lack of educational opportunities for different races to learn in schools. Tracking also provides little movement from a low-track to a high-track student while in high school (Beard, 2019).

Students who have entered high school in low-track classes will typically finish in low-track classes as the path created for students when they enter will follow to the end of high school (Bernhardt, 2018; Oakes, 2005). Giersch (2018) found that by the time students reached high school, the lower track students from middle school could no longer keep up with the higher track students.

Tracking can also influence a student's trajectory while in high school and their post-secondary and employment plans of the future (Adelman, 1999; Bernhardt, 2014b; Choy et al., 2000; King, 1996). Tracking has been found to create an opportunity gap. Opportunity gaps can occur due to low-income students being placed in low-track classes more than their high-income peers (Kelly, 2007; Oakes, 2005). Middle- and upper-class parents tend to know the value of their students being in higher track classes and typically use any resources to make sure that they are enrolled in those classes (Giersch, 2018). Darling-Hammond (2010) argues that course tracking has created an even more significant opportunity gap, which can be found in most high schools. Beard (2019) argues that lack of access to advanced curriculum presents unequal opportunities to higher education and disproportionately affects African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic students.

Enhancing Gifted Education for Underrepresented Students

Since 2014, the United States public student population has experienced a significant shift in the overall number of ethnic and racial minorities (Coronado & Lewis, 2017). Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans have surpassed the number of non-Hispanic Whites (Coronado & Lewis, 2017). However, the number of minority students in gifted programs has remained almost stagnant. In all school districts, there are procedures in place to identify students in middle and elementary schools for gifted and talented services. However, most of the time,

identification lies with testing, parent referral, and teacher recommendation. To help increase the number of minority students in GATE classes, alternative strategies need to be introduced and used by educators that go beyond testing and parent/teacher referrals. Researchers have found that the following strategies can be used to increase the number of minority students in gifted programs: recruitment, identification, and retention; multicultural education curriculum; talent development; and teacher training (Banks, 1999; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Russell, 2018; Siegle et al., 2016).

Recruitment, Identification, and Retention

Alternative strategies need to be used to increase the number of Hispanic and African American students identified for gifted services. Instead of relying on individual performance, group portfolios and group performances can be used to create a collection of work that would help improve the teacher's ability to identify gifted students compared to their ethnic peers. Portfolios and performances can include creating of murals, skits, songs, raps, group reports, and many other group activities that would help create a feeling of trust amongst students (Ramos, 2010). Small group interviews can also be used to help promote a comfortable and trusting environment with students. Worrell and Dixson (2018) recommend recruiting minority students for gifted programs in groups to foster their sense of belonging so that they have other students that look like them in the classes. For Hispanic students, school districts can begin using the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), which does not require literacy skills, so it does not reflect cultural bias (Ramos, 2010). Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) also recommend using rating scales and rubrics for identifying underrepresented students. Grissom and Redding (2016) encourage school districts to implement a more holistic evaluation of students by focusing on student creativity, artistic ability, and leadership. Holistic evaluations can help teachers cut the

impact of lower scores on the cognitive assessment that minority students usually have. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) also found that by implementing rating scales and rubrics, there was an increase of minority students identified for gifted services compared to traditional cognitive tests.

Educating parents of minority students on the opportunities of gifted programs at their children's school is essential. Many parents of minority students are unaware of the requirements and opportunities available to their children (Mun et al., 2020; Russell, 2018). Russell (2018) found that the inability to advocate for gifted services was especially true for English language learners, twice-exceptional learners, female-gifted learners, and gifted minority students; this can be especially true with those that have a language barrier. Having school personnel who can translate for non-English speaking households and convey the academic resources available at the school is also beneficial (Mun et al., 2020). Ford (2015) emphasizes that it is vital to make the parent referral easier, with the forms being less complicated and cumbersome, as that has been a complaint from minority parents. Mun et al. (2020) encourages schools to improve their outreach to families by disseminating information through home visitations and to "minority sponsored events in the community, and to improve connection with minority churches and corporations (p. 132). Building relationships between educators and parents can help build "cultural competence, empathy, and communication" that helps support and improve student growth" (Mun et al., 2020, p. 132). Training students who are gifted or who showed potential and their parents how to navigate the school system in terms of gifted advocacy, can also help reduce underrepresentation in gifted programs (Russell, 2018).

Universal screening is also beneficial to aid with identifying minority students for gifted services. One reason that universal screening is important is that it bypasses the teacher

nomination phase in the identification process and removes any subjectiveness from the process (Peters, 2021). Universal screening also ends alternative pathways for gifted identification, which increases inequality as well. By cutting alternative pathways, parents will no longer be able to obtain outside testing or any other method to bypass the identification process, thus reducing the amount of inequality that can be found in the process (Peters, 2021; Plucker et al., 2017; Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Universal screening consists of testing or seeing all students in a specific grade level. Plucker et al. (2017) explain that this can be very time-consuming. However, it also ensures that no student is overlooked in the process, which is typically the case with the traditional referral system.

The use of universal screening also makes it easier to implement local norms, as data will be collected on all students at every school in the district (Plucker et al., 2017). Plucker et al. (2017) explained that using local norms seeks to identify the most talented students within each school instead of students to state or national norms. Carmen et al. (2018) found that it nearly eliminated or reduced the underrepresentation of Hispanic and African American in the identification process by applying local norms. Peters (2021) reported that local norms would lead to fewer White and Asian Americans being identified; however, they would still be overidentified. It has been found that universal screening is effective and ultimately leads to an increase in the proportion of students classified as gifted; this is especially true for African American and Hispanic students, which would not have been identified in the traditional process (Lakin, 2016). Worrell and Dixson (2018) and Lakin (2016) both discussed that one of the most significant drawbacks to implementing universal screening is funding. For all students in a single grade to be tested, the tests must be bought, specialized personnel must be hired to monitor testing, and time must be allocated to conduct the tests (Worrell & Dixson, 2018).

Once progress has been made to reduce the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted classes, it is essential to keep those students in the gifted programs throughout their education. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) found that minority students are more likely to drop out of gifted programs than White students. Many strategies are recommended for use to keep students. It is important to provide academic and socio-emotional support, especially to the newly identified gifted students as they might not ethnically identify with the students in their classes (Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) and Worrell and Dixson (2018) stress the importance of having support and positive relationships with their teachers. Supportive teachers can help reduce stress and anxiety that minority students could be feeling in their gifted classes; focusing on the students' positive traits and behaviors can also help them excel in the gifted programs (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). "Wise feedback" is another support strategy that teachers can use to invoke high standards and provide negative feedback on assignments, that also encourages task completion and remediation of assignments (Worrell & Dixson, 2018, p. 219). The use of role models and mentors is another strategy that is beneficial to minority students in gifted programs. Worrell and Dixson (2018) encourage the use of role models and mentors that are engaged members of the underrepresented communities to encourage minority students that they can also be successful.

Multicultural Education Curriculum

Including multicultural education in the curriculum for gifted education could potentially be effective in increasing the retention of minority students (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Minority students need to meet and experience a curriculum that "highlights, showcases, speaks from points of view, life experiences, and contributions" of other marginalized groups (Milner &

Ford, 2007, p. 167). By including culture and everyday experiences specific to the target population, learning can be enhanced. Banks (1999) defined multicultural education as

> an educational reform movement designed to change the total educational environment so that students from diverse racial and ethnic groups, both genders, exceptional students, and students from each social-class group will experience equal educational opportunities in schools, colleges, and universities (p.359).

Banks (1999) introduced a hierarchical model that teachers can use to implement multicultural education into the classroom. These levels include the Contribution Approach, the Additive Approach, the Transformational Approach, and the Social Action Approach (Banks, 1999). The various levels stand for different levels of integration into the school curriculum. Due to the complexity, inexperienced teachers in multicultural education should begin with the contribution approach (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017).

While instructing gifted students, teachers must have a comprehensive understanding of diverse cultural topics and events relevant to their student population, as this can help them include multicultural education into their classrooms more easily (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) defended including multicultural curriculum in gifted programs as culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and it is in “direct response to the performance gap among American students based on race and socioeconomic status” (p. 83). Novak and Jones (2021) confirm that multicultural pedagogies and strategies help students relate course content to their own cultural context and typically look like celebrating cultural diversity and not just social justice work. Making gifted programs culturally relevant to underrepresented students can include enrichment activities that reflect their cultural heritage, which can also help them create their identity and belonging to the programs (Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Including

multicultural education in the curriculum does not just benefit the minority population. Inclusion helps all students see cultural differences as something to embrace and helps lead students toward positive interactions with diverse groups (Novak & Jones, 2021). Teachers must also make sure that the nature of the curriculum content used in the classroom is more than just historical, political, and social experiences, events, and challenges (Milner & Ford, 2007). Implementing the content and how and why it is included is just as crucial for students to understand.

Talent Development

A variety of interventions have been developed and implemented over the last 30 years to address the excellence gap and provide talent development for underrepresented students in gifted and talented programs (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Siegle et al. (2016) describe talent development as a two-part process. For talent development to be successful, opportunities must first be provided for talent to surface, talent must then be recognized, and educational opportunities must be provided (Siegle et al., 2016). It is essential that talent development models include experiences for students that help them prepare for the formal identification process and must include culturally relevant learning experiences that students find meaningful and relevant (Siegle et al., 2016). Many of these programs have been funded under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Javits), passed by Congress in 1988 (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Swanson, 2016). Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018) and Worrell et al. (2019) explain that supplemental enrichment and acceleration programs are necessary to combat opportunity gaps and will help provide access to enriching academic summer and weekend programs and exposure to higher education.

The primary goals of Javits are to reduce achievement gaps and increase opportunity and access. With the funding, Javits programs have been able to test high-powered curriculum and instruction strategies with culturally and linguistically diverse learners and allows researchers to learn more about what works to develop their academic talent (Swanson, 2016). Plucker et al. (2017) explain that the entire excellence gap intervention model is frontloading. Frontloading is preparing students for advanced programs before they even have a chance to be identified (Plucker et al., 2017). Underrepresented students need to be exposed to a more rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment, which will help ensure that they have the intellectual skills and academic habits that will allow them to thrive when they enter advanced classes (Plucker et al., 2017).

Siegle et al. (2016) discuss using the talent development model, which requires that opportunities must be provided for talent to be present, the talent must be then recognized, and educational opportunities must be provided to engage and enhance the emerging talent. The five steps include: pre-identification, preparation, identification, intervention, and outcomes (Renzulli, 2005). By using this five-step model, teachers can nurture students' talents and gifts. However, they will also be able to provide interventions for minority students, which will help prepare them for gifted services and advanced content (Siegle et al., 2016). Renzulli (2005) felt that giftedness is best described using a three-ring conception. This model, used for talent development, focuses on giftedness as the intersection of above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment (Russell, 2018).

Swanson et al. (2020) recommend the integrated curriculum model to raise the bar for all students. The integrated curriculum model used differentiation instruction for advanced learners that integrates curriculum, instruction, and assessment. VanTassel-Baska (2013) describes the

three dimensions of the model as the use of advanced content, process/product dimension that focuses on high-level instructional approaches, and writing persuasively. The integrated curriculum model is split into curriculum units of study that include curriculum framework, lessons designed for teachers, and supporting materials (Swanson et al., 2020). VanTassel-Baska (2013) provided evidence that the integrated curriculum model effectively teaches gifted learners and low-income and diverse students.

Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2017) recommends using Project Excite, which was created as a response to increasing access to academic supplemental programs to close the achievement gap. The project was designed to support and enhance students' interest and performance in math and science through extensive supplemental programming (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017). The program's goal is to prepare participants for advanced-level math and science coursework in high school. Adams and Chandler (2013) explain that Project Excite is an excellent example of a frontloading program and has been successful in bridging the gap in the readiness of some culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students. In addition to their regular schooling, students also attended Project Excite activities after school, weekends, and during the summer. Project Excite also includes parents in the program and hosts regular parent meetings to ensure that they are aware of the program components and expectations and parent educational events and parent workshops (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017).

Teacher Training

Teacher training can be conducted in a variety of forms. Workshops about a specific theme in gifted education, covered in a few hours to a more extensive license or diploma program can be completed (Mathijssn et al., 2021). Most states require a high-ability license or certificate, an add-on license beyond the regular instruction license (Mathijssn et al., 2021).

Laws, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Act, require that teacher education programs include training on identifying students who are gifted and talented and the instructional strategies to meet the needs of these students (Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020). Policies requiring teacher professional development and certification in gifted and talented education has a positive impact on teacher awareness and action regarding gifted students' academic needs and the social and emotional aspects of the services (Cannaday & Courduff, 2017; Russell, 2018).

Implementing professional development for teachers in identifying gifted students will allow teachers to better understand what to look for (Mathijssn et al., 2021). Although certification and training are not always available, teachers are more likely to participate if programs are developed that consider their needs (Cannaday & Courduff, 2017). Cannaday and Courduff (2017) report that teachers also find certification and training to improve their pedagogical practice with gifted students. Proactive attention to advanced learners in a single district, allows administration to organize training on topics that they find valuable (Plucker et al., 2017). Topics related to advanced learning should be in the rotation, just like any topic of need. These topics can include supporting minority students in advanced education. This is especially true as many teachers do not understand how to identify giftedness outside of their ethnicity due to cultural differences (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Grissom and Redding (2016) emphasize that teacher preparation and professional development can be an avenue that leads to a reduction of racial disparities at the teacher referral stage. Park and Denson (2009) and Engberg (2004) also argue that diversity training can reduce racial bias in teachers' perceptions, which will help decrease the excellence gap.

According to Worrell and Dixson (2018), proper teacher training means more than learning gifted pedagogy for teachers and requires learning how to teach minority students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy can help minority students see themselves in the curriculum and affect their sense of belonging and motivation (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Wright and Ford (2017) stress that courses and degree programs in teacher education must focus on culture, race, and income to become more culturally competent. Increasing teacher training to incorporate a more multicultural curriculum, can also help them use different strategies in their classrooms, which will help foster the development of the education of minority students (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). This will ultimately provide the comfort many of these students need to excel. Crawford, Snyder, et al. (2020) argue that teacher education programs typically address the importance of multicultural awareness; however, what is known does not always align with what is practiced in the classroom. Teachers prepared in gifted and culturally responsive education will be more equity-minded and advocate for the Hispanic and African American students (Ford, 2015). Wright and Ford (2017) recommend providing professional development that focuses on underrepresented gifted students and families. Ford et al. (2020) add that attending community events and family visits can provide insight to gifted and talented students of color. In addition, teachers are urged to continue their training and take advantage of opportunities to learn more about gifted education through workshops and conferences (Wright & Ford, 2017).

In addition to teacher training, current literature stresses the need to hire diverse and culturally competent candidates who know the purpose of acceleration (Mun et al., 2020). School leaders need to be aware of the impact that these educators will have and will need to alter their hiring practices. Hiring more gifted and talented teachers that are minorities themselves, can also improve the identification of minority students (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Black and Hispanic teachers each represent 7% of the teaching population, and minority teachers in GATE

classes, is even more disproportionate (Ford et al., 2020). Morgan (2019) argues that by having more minority teachers in schools, they will perceive same-race students more favorably and hold these students to a higher standard. Minority teachers will also be able to relate culturally with their students (Mun et al., 2020). The bureaucratic representation theory emphasizes that the higher percentage of teachers of color in gifted classrooms increases the number of students of color that will be placed in gifted classes (Morgan, 2019).

Summary

Historically, there has been an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. As discussed, there are many reasons why this has occurred, including standardized testing, academic tracking, cultural differences in learning, and teacher discretion, being leading factors. These factors can negatively affect the identification and classification of minority students in gifted classes. Teacher referrals were the most prevalent in literature as teachers spend the most time with the students and are the most aware of their abilities in the classroom. To improve and enhance gifted education for underrepresented students, alternative strategies need to be used beyond testing and teacher referrals as these have proven to be subjective and at times biased. By using recruitment and identification, multicultural education curriculum, talent development, and teacher training educators can focus on the underrepresented population in the education setting and create an environment that can foster and mold these students to exceed in their coursework.

It is essential to include a theoretical foundation when conducting a research study as it helps to support and inform the research (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Utilizing the invitational theory is highly beneficial to this study as it provides a critical framework when analyzing the research questions. The invitational theory provides a framework that supports that a student can

perform at a higher ability when invited and included in academic activities, including higher-level academic classes. Through inclusion, all students will show gains in their education by inviting minority students to participate in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes as it promotes multicultural learning. Minority students need to feel comfortable in their classes to be successful and to continue taking advanced placement and honors-level courses. By including more minority students in the advanced placement and honors-level classes, minority students will begin to feel as though they belong in the classes and see more students that look like them.

While conducting research on this topic, a large amount can be found that has been conducted on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. However, much of the research is focused on minority students in the grades at the elementary and middle school levels, as that is when most students are identified and recommended to be tested for giftedness by state testing results, teachers, and parents. However, at the high school level, the opportunity to participate in gifted classes, such as honors and advanced placements classes, changes, and the requirements can also change by the district. Students no longer require the classification of being gifted, rather teachers can recommend any student for honors-level and advanced placement classes no matter their ability level. In addition, parents now can override teacher recommendations and request that their student is placed in a higher-level class. To promote inclusivity, Advanced placement classes are required to have open enrollment. This policy from the College Board eliminates any requirements that a student would need to meet. Although not all students can perform and achieve the desired results in higher-level classes, many students who are not currently enrolled will be able to succeed in the classes. Students need to be invited to participate in the higher-level classes to challenge themselves and motivate them to take and

remain enrolled in these classes. For this study, the process of teacher recommendations is researched as there is a lack of studies conducted that look at the processes used by a teacher to recommend students for advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school level.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this embedded multiple-case study was to explore the process and experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level classes at three high schools in a school district in the Low Country of South Carolina. The embedded multiple-case study was focused on the "how" and "why" of the teachers and allowed me to collect data from a variety of sources (Yin, 2018). The study's design is discussed further with a thorough description of the important components of a qualitative case study. The setting and the participants of the study will be reviewed. The participants involved in this study included 12 teachers from three different schools in Campbell school District in the Low Country of South Carolina. The procedures of the study will also be discussed, which includes the IRB process and approval. The interviews conducted with the participants created the most amount of data; however, surveys and documentation also played a significant role in understanding the gifted and talented programs in the district as well as the ethnic make-up of the district and high schools, and the processes that are used in the recommendation process. After the data was collected, data analysis was conducted to determine the "why" and "how" of the phenomena (Yin, 2018). Lastly, trustworthiness and ethical consideration are discussed for the study to determine any negative impacts of the study validate the data that was collected from the teachers.

Design

This study was designed using a qualitative research approach as this methodology is aligned to this study's purpose. A qualitative study's focus is to make the world visible through a variety of representations that can include field notes, interviews, conversations, and digital

interview recordings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these practices were used throughout the study. When beginning qualitative research, researchers begin with assumptions and theoretical frameworks that help formulate the research and the problems addressing individuals or groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative study is more appropriate than a quantitative study, as the study did not focus on the association between variables or sets of scores but instead on teachers' experiences (Creswell, 2012). With this research study, a group of teachers were interviewed to explore their understanding of gifted high school courses and the impact of the underrepresentation of minority students in these classes.

A case study is designed to develop an in-depth analysis of a specific case at a specific time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study explored a phenomenon within a real-world context in which it can be seen and is experienced (Yin, 2018). It was essential that the phenomena were real-life cases and in progress so that research can be gathered and not lost to time (Dale-Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). There were five components of this case study research design. The first part was the case study research questions. These questions consisted of "how" and "why" questions, and literature was used to narrow the interest of the questions (Yin, 2018, p. 27). The next part is the propositions of the study. Each proposition directed the researcher to something that should be looked at regarding the study's scope (Yin, 2018). The third part was identifying the case that was studied. Identifying the case included the process of "defining the case" and "bounding the case" (Yin, 2018, p. 28). To define the case, the individuals that will be studied were identified and to bound the case, the researcher set the boundaries of who would and not be included, as well as the period that will be studied (Yin, 2018).

Case studies can focus on individuals or small groups, including families, organizations, schools, and social movements (Yin, 2018). Identifying an individual or small group was

considered as defining the case. Bounding the case involved determining who was included or excluded from the group and included time boundaries, distinguishing the beginning and end of the study (Yin, 2018). The fourth part included linking the data to the propositions. This part determined the study's data analysis steps and included pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018, p. 33). It was essential to plan a proper amount of data collection as it is common to collect too much data or not enough data (Yin, 2018). The fifth part included determining the criteria needed to interpret the strength of the case study's findings. This step was completed in the research design by identifying and addressing rival explanations of the research study's findings (Yin, 2018).

There are four distinct types of designs that can be used when conducting a case study. A single-case holistic, a multi-case holistic, a single-case embedded, or a multi-case embedded design can be used. A single case is when a single experiment will be conducted. When determining whether to use a holistic or embedded single-case study, the researcher must determine if study will focus on a single unit of analysis or multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2018). To be considered a single case study, there needs to be a single unit or organization considered. A holistic study will only look at the full organization, where an embedded study will also look at the organization's different subunits (Yin, 2018). A multiple-case study would entail looking at multiple separate organizations. Fieldwork would need to be conducted at each site as a single-case study before combining the findings and creating a conclusion that crosses all the organizations (Yin, 2018). A multiple-case study can also be holistic or embedded.

A case study was an appropriate research design when exploring the topic of the underrepresentation of minority students in honors and advanced placement classes at the high school level. For the study, one district was used to collect data and it was a multiple-case study,

as I looked at the three different high schools within the district. For this study, I reviewed the teacher recommendation process and how it can affect minority representation in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. This case study explored the "how" and "whys" of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018, p. 27). The case study explored why the phenomenon is occurring at the site and focused on a case in real life a specific problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study required multiple sources of information when conducting data collection. For this case study, I used interviews, documents, and reports which were collected and took place over a set period.

Research Questions

The purpose of this embedded multiple-case study is to explore the process and experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level classes at three high schools in a school district in the Low Country of South Carolina. The following central question and three sub-questions were used to explore the phenomena and develop the themes that appeared from the study.

Central Research Question

How do teachers describe the recommendation process for academic placement at the high school?

Sub-Question One

What practices are used to recommend students for honors and advanced placement level classes at the high school?

Sub-Question Two

What are the best practices to encourage students to participate in higher-level classes at the high schools?

Sub-Question Three

What are the practices of collaboration and communication that take place with colleagues, school counselors, students, and parents during the recommendation process?

Setting

The setting of this research study consisted of three high schools within one district from the Low Country of South Carolina. The Low Country is considered the area east of Columbia, South Carolina, that is near the Atlantic Ocean. The district is referred to as Campbell School District, and the high schools are identified as Laurel Springs High School, Fair Oaks High School, and Gold River High School. This district was chosen as they have a culturally diverse student body and consist of multiple high schools. As schools within one district, they typically face similar issues and have similar policies in place for their students. Campbell School District has a superintendent at the school district's helm and then has a head principal and multiple assistant principals at each high school. As the researcher, I previously worked for the school district and wanted to explore the process of teacher recommendations for honors and AP level classes at other schools in the district I worked.

Participants

In this research study, the sample pool consisted of general education teachers of high school classes at the college prep, honors, or advanced placement levels. As this research study explored the process of teacher recommendation in three different schools, the sample size included four teachers from each school. In a case study, there is typically a sample of one; however, there was sampling within the case (Schoch, 2020). Within the district, three sites were used. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that case studies typically include four to five cases. Between all three sites, 12 participants were interviewed, and four school counselors were surveyed. However, data collection ended when all the study's themes had been saturated

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The idea of saturation describes the process in which data collection is no longer necessary as the new data collected no longer provides any additional insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this research study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling was beneficial to this study as it allowed selecting the individuals, documents, and artifacts that allowed the most in-depth study of the phenomenon (Schoch, 2020). This research study aimed to explore the process that all the teachers have experienced with the same phenomenon. Each of the teachers interviewed had experience in recommending students for honors and AP classes. All the teachers provided insight into the specific phenomenon on which the study was focused (Schoch, 2020). The study's saturation required the collection of enough data until the themes were saturated, and collecting new data no longer provided additional insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants' demographic background included teachers of both genders, varied ethnicities, and teacher experience varied from five to 35 years in education. (See Table 1).

Procedures

Before collecting the data, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was a crucial step as the IRB must determine that the study design follows its guidelines for ethical research, and research cannot be conducted until approval is granted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approval letter may be found in Appendix A. Once the research study's approval was granted by the IRB, the sites and individuals needed to be identified and approved before research could begin (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For a qualitative study, individuals must be able to help the researcher understand the specific phenomenon and accessible, willing, and distinctive for their accomplishments and experience in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition to having willing participants,

it was also important to have written permission from participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The consent forms for the participants can be found in Appendix B. When gathering data from the participants, it was first important to determine what research questions I wanted to be answered and refined the questions as needed. It was also important to design an interview protocol to focus my interviewing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When conducting all parts of the data collection process, there was distraction-free place. Lastly, recording procedures were a critical part of the data collection process. A protocol was used to record information, and multiple devices were used in case of malfunction of any of the devices. By recording interviews and observations, I was able to go back and organize the information as needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The above steps were followed for this study, and the review process that the IRB conducted required all of these procedural steps to be submitted and approved before any research was conducted.

The Researcher's Role

While conducting qualitative research, the researcher is seen as an instrument of data collection in which the data is mediated through the researcher instead of through inventories and questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As the researcher in this study, it was important to let the teachers know about any biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences that have led me to this point and my qualifications and ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). As a teacher of 18 years, I have had the opportunity to teach high school students at all different ability levels. This has included special education self-contained students who have only been on the path of receiving a certificate of attendance; to students who are primarily enrolled in AP classes and are in the top five of their class. Through these experiences, I have observed classrooms full of minority students and others with minimal minority students enrolled in the

classes. It is the latter that has brought me to this point in my research. The biases that I hold are that I have seen and experienced firsthand the underrepresentation of minority students sitting in my honors and AP classes. I found it concerning when I looked out at my students, and most of them were White. I have also experienced the recommendation process at one of the high schools in one of the districts.

My expectation of the data collected was that other teachers would have the same experience. I held an etic researcher's role in which I was an objective observer instead of being a participant in the study (Punch, 1998). Bias could have also possibly arisen as I was employed by the district that is being studied for ten years. To end this type of bias, bracketing was used to set aside experiences and look at the phenomenon under being studied with a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure that my own experiences are not influencing the data being collected, I used a research journal to keep track of my own experiences and thoughts throughout the study. I am also familiar with many of the teachers within the three high schools of the district. Glense and Peshkin (1992) refer to this as "backyard" research, and due to the researcher's familiarity with the participants, it can lead to undue influence on the researcher's interpretation. As this have become an issue, it was important to show that the data was not compromised, and the participants were not at risk (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When collecting data, it was important for me to stick to the interview questions and to not allow former personal relationships to enter the discussion. I also used "critical colleagues" to offer differing explanations and suggestions throughout the data collection process (Yin, 2018, p. 87). This helped end bias as it focused on contrary findings.

Data Collection

Data collection is an essential part of any research study. In a case study, there are several desired skills that Yin (2018) discusses that are important of a case study researcher. When collecting data, it is important to ask good questions, be a good listener, adapt to the situation, stay focused on the issues being studied, and conduct research ethically (Yin, 2018). There are six different types of sources that can be used when conducting a case study. Documentation can be relevant to almost every case study and includes emails, administrative documents, formal studies, and news clippings (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) explains that documentation can be beneficial but can also be biased, so it is important to corroborate evidence from multiple sources. Archival records can be used with other sources when conducting a case study. It can include records such as public use files, service records, organizational records, maps, and survey data and tends to be highly quantitative (Yin, 2018).

Interviewing is one of the most important types of data collection in a case study as it can provide explanations of the "how" and "whys" of events (Yin, 2018, p. 118). Interviews for case studies can be more like a guided conversation and can be conducted over several hours or many sittings (Yin, 2018). A survey interview can also be used in which a structured questionnaire is used. Direct observations can range from formal to casual data collection and includes observations of meetings and classrooms (Yin, 2018). Participant-observations is another mode of observation used in which the researcher will participate in the study (Yin, 2018). Lastly, physical artifacts can be used and can either be collected or observed (Yin, 2018). When conducting a case study, it is important to use multiple sources of data collection. Dale-Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) and Yin (2018) stresses the importance of collecting different data types as triangulation is critical to creating an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

There are various methods that can be used; however, interviews, surveys, and documentation were used for this study. The first step for this study was to conduct interviews with selected teachers that have had experience in the recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. This process was the most time-consuming but created the most beneficial amount of data as the participants will be sharing their experiences with the common phenomena (Yin, 2018). Documentation was analyzed as a tool to understand the GATE referral process in the district as well as the ethnic make-up of the school community. Lastly, surveys were used to collect a broader amount of data from school counselors on their experiences with the student recommendation process.

Interview*s*

Information was gathered through interviews with teachers who have had experience in the recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level classes and were able to report on those experiences with an underrepresentation of minority students in these classes. Interviews are a key part of case studies as they will allow me to collect data that can answer the how and why questions of critical events in the study and the insights from the participants (Yin, 2018). Participants were asked questions on their experiences in this process and they reported what they thought were the causes of the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level academic classes at the high school. Interviews were conducted one-on-one and were conducted using an online meeting platform (Zoom). Interviews were recorded using Zoom and with an additional recording device (i.e., personal cell phone). Information for interviews was also collected by analyzing school reports consisting of school report cards, GATE data, and the referral and identification process of GATE students. During the interview process, open-ended questions were used to elicit views and opinions from the participants and

were collected manually by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Questions one through three are background questions and are designed to learn basic information about the participant and their teaching experience. These questions are intended to be relatively straightforward and non-threatening and allowed the participant to become comfortable in the interviewing process and help them open to future, more in-depth questions.

Questions four through 10 required the participant to describe their experience and knowledge of the gifted and talented referral process within their district and any training or education they have received regarding working with and identifying gifted students. The identification process has been seen as a significant issue with the equal representation of minority students in gifted and talented programs, so it is vital to explore the participant's experience (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019)

Questions 11 and 12 invited the participant to reflect on their perspective of what they see in their classrooms. It also allowed the participant to reflect on what they believe are the issues as to why there is an underrepresentation of minority students in upper-level high school classes.

Question 13 and 14 required participants to reflect on the policies that are in place in other departments at their school. Some participants might know the recommended policies for students to move to honors and AP classes, while others may not. There might even be a universal policy for all departments in a school or even the district for this process. These questions also focus on what types of communication and/or collaboration take place to ensure that the right group of students are recommended for honors-level and Advanced Placement classes.

Questions 15 and 16 required the participant to reflect on their classroom curriculum and what they teach in their classes, and whether it represents the culturally diverse students that attend their schools. Multicultural education can enable a student to feel included in the educational process and promotes further participation (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). It can also be detrimental to whether a student continues taking upper-level classes.

Questions 17, 18 and 19 focus on the inhibitors that prevent minority students from taking high-level classes in high school and sought the participants' opinion on what they believe are different strategies that could be implemented to increase minority enrollment in these classes.

Surveys

Yin (2018) explains that another type of case study interview is a survey using a structured questionnaire. In addition to the specific interviews that were conducted with select teachers in the study, a survey was used to collect school counselors' experiences with the recommendation process with students for their classes as well as with the underrepresentation of minority students in honors and advanced placement classes. Other than teachers, school counselors interact with students while meeting during their Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) meetings. School counselors have the capability of being an important link between teachers and parents and the conversations that they are having can gauge the level of interest there might be for an invitation to take higher-level classes. Four school counselors were surveyed, and survey questions can be found in Appendix C. Surveys are typically used with quantitative data collection but can be used in conjunction with many other qualitative data collection methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Surveys are beneficial in the data collection process as they are typically unobtrusive, easy to administer, and easy to manage (Bloomberg &

Volpe, 2019). Utilizing open-ended questions in the survey allowed me to dive into their individual experiences with the phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Documentation

A variety of different documents were used for data collection in this research study. Documentation can play an essential role in a case study; however, it is also important as it could have false information (Yin, 2018). The documentation created for each department to follow for the teacher recommendation process was analyzed for each high school in the district to determine their similarities and differences. These documents can be found in Appendix E and help support the research questions as they help determine if participants understand the process in their district and will allow the researcher to explore whether one policy is more beneficial than another. This documentation also provided data on whether teachers follow the procedures or use their judgment on what classes a student should be recommended for. Documents that reported the ethnic make-up of the district, schools, and students enrolled in honors, and AP classes were analyzed to explore the underrepresentation of minority students in all three schools to help support the research data collected from the educators and explore whether there is an underrepresentation of minority students in each school, see Appendix F. Documentation was collected and analyzed from the interviews and survey questions.

Data Analysis

When completing the analysis of a case study, the data analysis process required the use of analytic techniques. Patton (2015) advises that the best way to analyze the data collected is to read it repeatedly, as this helped me identify additional patterns and categories. Data analysis included the process of describing, interpreting, drawing conclusions, and determining significance (Schoch, 2020). The first step in the data analysis process conducted for this study

was reading the transcripts from the interviews and reviewing the data collected from the surveys. Coding, pattern matching, and constant comparison are the different types of data analysis that were used while developing the thematic units of this study (Yin, 2018).

Pattern Matching

The most widely used technique is pattern matching (Yin, 2018). When pattern-matching, you will focus on the processes and outcomes of the case study. Explanation building is like pattern-matching but requires the researcher to build an explanation about the case, which explains "how" or "why" an outcome has occurred (Yin, 2018, p. 179). For this study, the analytic technique of pattern matching was used. Once data was collected, it was reviewed extensively to discover and show patterns or themes (Schoch, 2020). Through this process, patterns, themes, and categories emerged that allowed the introduction of codes. Open coding allowed the recognition of patterns that appeared from the data instead of analyzing data based on existing frameworks (Schoch, 2020).

Coding

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe coding as the process of organizing data into bracketing chunks and writing a word to stand for a category. The codes that are created from the research data are used to "summarize and put labels on patterns, themes, or categories observed in the data" (Schoch, 2020, p. 121). After all of the interviews, surveys, and documents were collected, transcribed, and analyzed, a list was made of all the topics observed. Similar topics were clustered together and formed into columns and then categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These categories then helped develop the research into themes.

Constant Comparison

In addition to and while simultaneously completing coding, comparisons were made across the different categories and sites (Schoch, 2020). Coding allowed the recognition of similarities and differences of patterns between the three different sites in the case study. Making comparisons between the different sites in the case study helped better understand the findings; but did not lead to follow-up interviews with participants (Miles et al., 2020). It was also necessary to look back at the transcription of interviews to further explore the participant explanations (Miles et al., 2020).

Development of Thematic Units

In addition to coding, thematic phrases were used to identify data units (Miles et al., 2020). Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe themes as statements qua, which are the ideas that participants present during interviews that describe what is going on and explain what is happening. The themes that were found in the study are the significant findings and led to the headings in the findings section of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The identified themes also presented the different perspectives from the participants and formulated complex connections between themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A cross-case analysis was used to help create themes from the interviews, surveys, and document collection to help analyze each case and then "synthesize any within-case patterns across all of the cases" (Yin, 2018, p. 196).

Trustworthiness

To increase the trustworthiness of this study, there were a variety of strategies that were used to validate the research findings. The use of triangulation and multiple sources of data was used to prove creditability. This process increases the sources' dependability to provide corroborating evidence of different sources, methods, investigators, and theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity was also used through the disclosure of the researcher's understandings

from the outset of the study; the reader can understand the inquiry that is conducted and why (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process increases the study's validity as past experiences will have likely shaped the researcher's approach and interpretation of the study. Continued engagement in the field-based decisions is made per what is relevant to the study, the purpose, and the interest of focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process increased the study's validity by enabling me to build a rapport with the participants.

Credibility

To ensure that the research is credible, several strategies were implemented. Triangulation was the most often used as it allows for various data collection processes to ensure that the data collected was accurate and creditable (Shenton, 2004). This method included using a wide range of participants so that their experiences could be verified against others (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring honesty among participants was another method used, as it allowed participants to decide whether they would participate and could refuse participation at any time. This helped foster credibility between the researcher and participants (Shenton, 2004). Prolonged engagement in the field was another method used to ensure the credibility of the data collection process. I made decisions based on their experiences in the field based on the study's relevance and focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before beginning the collection of data and throughout my engagement in the field, I built relationships with the participants and learned the "culture and context" of the site (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability was carried out by detailing the process in which the study is conducted in detail to be conducted again by another researcher (Shenton, 2004). This process was carried out through a "rich and thick" description of the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). A study is

considered “rich and thick” if it provides an abundance of interconnected detail when writing about a case (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). Confirmability was used to ensure that the study is objective and not only represents the researcher’s experience but is instead focused on the participants’ experiences. Member checking was used to ensure that participants’ views of the findings were represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were the major actors of the case study and evaluated rough drafts of the research study to provide additional language (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). The use of triangulation was also used to reduce research bias (Shenton, 2004). My ability to admit my predispositions to the research topic was used for confirmability. The disclosure of “biases, values, and experiences” at the beginning of the study, allowed the reader to understand their position and focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, arranging an external audit of the study allowed someone with no connection to the study to evaluate the process and product of the research to determine the data support the “findings, interpretations, and conclusions” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process confirmed the validity of the study.

Transferability

Transferability is important in qualitative research as it is used to show that the research topic can be transferred to a broader population (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is important in qualitative research as it makes it possible to create connections across studies to help show the applicability of the research (Dale-Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I enabled the reader to make decisions regarding transferability based on the “rich and thick” description of the participants and or setting of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability provides readers of a study to decide whether the processes studied will work in their setting by understanding how the process took place at the research site (Dale-Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Inequality in education has

been a topic that has been discussed for many decades and can be seen in the education system from state to state.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research study process, there were possible ethical issues that could arise. Before conducting the study, there were several ethical issues that could have been experienced. The institutional review board's approval from the associated college or university is necessary before the collection of data takes place (Appendix A). This review ensured that the study addressed ethical issues related to respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Respect for persons involved in the treatment of the participants and ensuring their privacy. It is important to ensure that the consent process was followed, and participants understood their rights and could withdraw from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Concern for welfare ensures the protection of participants, and they were not at risk by participating in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Making sure that justice is considered an ethical issue focused on participants being treated fairly and equitably (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As I contacted the site, informed consent was necessary and required for the study to continue (Appendix B). The purpose of the study was also discussed with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were made aware that the study was voluntary and that they would not be put at risk with the consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gaining access to the specific site of the study was necessary. One way to help address this issue is to speak to the site's gatekeepers for help (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One issue could be a possible negative impact on the school/teachers/administrators involved in the study due to reporting an issue. This was addressed using pseudonyms for the school, teachers, and administrators, so their identities remained confidential. Another potential issue in the research study is that evidence, data, and

findings could be falsified. To ensure this did not occur, honest and correct reports were created of what was reported during the interviews. It was also important to respect the study sites and avoid disclosing information that could hurt a participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, data storage could be compromised. To maintain the confidentiality of participants and the data collected, data storage was transferred to two flash drives and locked in the file cabinets at the researcher's home.

Summary

Utilizing a multiple-case study allowed the researcher to explore the underrepresentation of minority students in honors and advanced placement classes from the teacher's role at high schools within one district found in the Low Country of South Carolina. This research design allowed the researcher to focus on the study and the process of teacher recommendations for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes and not on the predisposed notions and experiences with the topic. Through the interview process of 12 teachers in three different schools within the district, I collected data on a variety of questions that will provide a better understanding as to why there is an underrepresentation of minority students and what role the teacher plays in the process. Through data collection of documents, the completion of surveys, and conducting interviews, the data was analyzed to find what the themes are and, ultimately, the "why" and "how" of the experiences of the participants with the phenomena. Trustworthiness and ethical consideration are a vital piece of the research design when deciding the validity of the study and whether I allowed my own biases of the topic to interfere.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this embedded multiple-case study was to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. The cases were three high schools in Campbell School District in the Low Country of South Carolina: Fair Oaks High School, Gold River High School, and Laurel Springs High School. Data was collected via teacher interviews, surveys, and documentation. Data analysis consisted of pattern matching, coding, constant comparison, and the development of themes (Yin, 2018). This chapter presents the backgrounds and current roles of the teachers and school counselors who were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. This chapter also presents theme development and the data collection methods to address the research questions. The chapter ends with a summary.

Participants

This multi-case study included three cases within the Campbell School District: Fair Oaks High School, Gold River High School, and Laurel Springs High School. The study included 12 participants, four teachers from each high school. Each participant fit the criteria presented in the previous chapter. The participants of the study were either Caucasian or African American. All the participants had worked in the Campbell School District for more than five years, and some had been teachers for more than 30 years. Each of the teachers was certified by the state of South Carolina as educators and holds a bachelor's degree; some of the teachers have obtained a master's degree. In addition to the 12 teacher participants, four school counselors completed a survey asking various questions related to the teacher recommendation process. The

following are descriptions of the teacher participants that were interviewed and the school counselors who completed a survey.

Table 1

Teacher and School Counselor Participants

Participant	School	Role
Nicole	Fair Oaks High School	Teacher
Bethany	Fair Oaks High School	Teacher
Maggie	Fair Oaks High School	Teacher
Robyn	Fair Oaks High School	Teacher
Sherry	Fair Oaks High School	School Counselor
Sean	Gold River High School	Teacher
Greg	Gold River High School	Teacher
Conner	Gold River High School	Teacher
Lisa	Gold River High School	Teacher
Tom	Gold River High School	School Counselor
Gwen	Laurel Springs High School	Teacher
Harris	Laurel Springs High School	Teacher
Teri	Laurel Springs High School	Teacher
Pam	Laurel Springs High School	Teacher
Julie	Laurel Springs High School	School Counselor
Kristen	Laurel Springs High School	School Counselor

Nicole

Nicole was a White woman and has worked as a social studies teacher at Fair Oaks High School for five years. She has obtained her bachelor's degree and the Gifted and Talented (GT) endorsement and an Advanced Placement endorsement in a social studies class. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level.

Bethany

Bethany was a White woman and has worked as a math teacher at Fair Oaks High School for nine years and at a middle school in the district for one year. She has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree in secondary math as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement and an Advanced Placement endorsement in a math class. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the tech prep, college prep, and AP level at the high school and a course at a middle school for students that performed higher than the regular math level but not identified as gifted and talented. She was identified for gifted and talented services while she was a student in the Campbell School District.

Maggie

Maggie was a White woman and has worked as a science teacher for 16 years at several schools, most recently at Fair Oaks High School. She has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement and an Advanced Placement endorsement in a science class. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP levels the high

school. She also has two children that have attended Fair Oaks High School and have taken classes at the AP and honors-level classes.

Robyn

Robyn was a White woman and has worked as an English teacher for 35 years at Fair Oaks High School, Laurel Springs High School, and a middle school in the district. She has most recently taught and held the co-department head position at Fair Oaks High School for the last 11 years. She is a National Board-Certified Teacher and has obtained her bachelor's degree, as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement, which was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep and honors level at the high school. She also has had two children who attended and graduated from Fair Oaks High School.

Sherry

Sherry is a Black female and has worked as a school counselor for the last nine years at Fair Oaks High School. She has obtained her Master's in Education in School Counseling and her certification as a Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF). She holds her school counselor certificate for the state of South Carolina.

Sean

Sean is a White man and has worked as a social studies teacher for the last 25 year at several different schools, most recently at Gold River High School. In addition to being a teacher at Gold River High School, he has held the department head position. He has obtained his bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement and an Advanced Placement endorsement for several classes. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. He has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level at the high school.

Conner

Conner is an African American man who has worked as a math teacher for the last nine years at several different schools, most recently at Gold River High School. He has obtained his bachelor's degree and an Advanced Placement endorsement for a math class. In addition, he is also certified as an International Baccalaureate (IB) teacher for math. He has taught students at the college prep, IB, and AP level at the high school.

Lisa

Lisa was a White woman and has worked as a science teacher for nine years at several schools, most recently at Gold River High School. She has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement, and an Advanced Placement endorsement in a science class. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the state of South Carolina instead of the district due to the price of the courses. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level at the high school. She also has two children that have attended Fair Oaks High School and have taken classes at the AP and honors-level classes.

Greg

Greg is a White man and has worked as a social studies teacher for the last 14 years teacher at Gold River High School and at a middle school in the district. He has obtained his bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement. In addition, he is also certified as an International Baccalaureate (IB) teacher for several social studies classes. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. He has taught students at the college prep, honors, IB, level at the high school. He also has a son that has been identified for gifted and talented services in the Campbell School District.

Tom

Tom is a White male and has worked as a school counselor for the last two years at Gold River High School. He has obtained his bachelor's degree in Workforce Education and his Master's in Education in School Counseling. He holds his school counselor certificate for the state of South Carolina.

Gwen

Gwen was a White woman and has worked as a social studies teacher for 14 years at Laurel Springs High School. She is a National Board-Certified Teacher and has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree, as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement, which was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level at the high school. She also has a son that has been identified for gifted and talented services in the Campbell School District.

Harris

Harris was a White man and has worked as a math teacher for the last seven years teacher at Laurel Springs High School and at the alternative high school in the district. He has obtained his bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement. His GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. He has taught students at the college prep and honors level at the high school. He also has had a child that has attended and graduated from Laurel Springs High School.

Teri

Teri was a White woman and has worked as a science teacher for 11 years at several different schools, most recently at Laurel Springs High School. She has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement, and an Advanced

Placement endorsement in a science class. The GT endorsement was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level at the high school. She also has two children that have attended Fair Oaks High School and have taken classes at the AP and honors-level classes.

Pam

Pam was a White woman and has worked as an English teacher for 29 years at Laurel Springs High School. She has most recently taught and held the position of department head for the last several years. She is a National Board-Certified Teacher and has obtained her bachelor's degree and master's degree, as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement, which was completed through the two courses offered by the district. She has taught students at the college prep, honors, and AP level at the high school. She also has had two children that have attended and graduated from Laurel Springs High School.

Julie

Julie is a White female and has worked as a school counselor for the last eight years at Laurel Springs High School. She has obtained her Master's in Education in School Counseling and a Master's in Clinical Counseling. She also obtained her Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) certificate. She holds her school counselor certificate for the state of South Carolina.

Kristen

Kristen is a White female and has worked as a school counselor for the last nineteen years at Laurel Springs High School. She has obtained her Master's in Education in School Counseling and a Ph.D. in Counselor Education. She holds her school counselor and secondary

social studies certificates for the state of South Carolina, as well as the Gifted and Talented endorsement.

Results

Through the teacher interviews, school counselor surveys, and document analysis, the data generated five themes. The first theme related to teacher's experiences with gifted and talented services in the district and the support provided by the district to identify and educate gifted and talented students. The second theme focused on the recommendation practices with sub-themes of district/department mandates and identifiers used by teachers. The recommendation process is used to determine student placement for the upcoming school year. At the high school, the core teachers (math, English, social studies, and science) recommend each student for the next course in their subject, and if the student should be in college prep, honors, or advanced placement. The third theme centered around the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes with sub-themes of home and school influences. The fourth theme dealt with increasing enrollment in advanced placement and honors-level classes with sub-themes of student support and outreach. The fifth theme was related to the collaboration of stakeholders to diversify student representation with sub-themes of positive and negative collaboration. During the recommendation process, collaboration can occur between administrators, other teachers, parents, and students. Table 2 summarizes the themes and sub-themes that emerged from data analysis. The codes for each theme can be found in Appendix G.

Table 2

Themes

Themes	Sub-themes

Gifted and Talented Services and Support	District/Administrative Level Experiences Teacher Experiences
Recommendation Practices	District/Department Mandates Teacher Identifiers
Underrepresentation of Minority Students in AP/H Classes	Home Influences School Influences
Increase AP/Honors Enrollment	Student Support Outreach
Collaboration of Stakeholders	Parents and Students School Faculty and Staff

Gifted and Talented Services and Support

The teachers have varying experiences with the services and support they have received for their gifted and talented students. In South Carolina, teachers must have a Gifted and Talented Endorsement to teach honors-level high school courses. There is a one-year grace period for teachers who can teach an honors course but need to earn the endorsement before they can teach for a second year. All but one of the 12 teachers interviewed have earned their Gifted and Talented Endorsements. Campbell School District does offer the two graduate-level courses through the district at the teacher's expense. All but one of the 11 teachers that have their endorsement completed it through the district, while one completed it through the state for a lower fee.

District and Administration Level Experiences

Throughout the interviews with the teachers, a reoccurring theme when asked about their experience with GT services was that teachers did not recall any additional training or support from the district to assist them with teaching their Gifted and Talented (GT) students as well evaluate. Teachers also reported that there was no training to help them identify students for

honors and advanced placement classes. Teri from Laurel Springs High School shared that besides her classes for the GT endorsement, she did not remember any other training from their professional development time through the years. If there were any, they were geared towards elementary school teachers. Harris, also at Laurel Springs High School, explained that "the only training he had attended was either through his general education or GT endorsement classes." Teachers from Gold River had a similar experience, with Lisa stating that "the only additional training she has received was for special education students,"

In contrast, Conner, the only teacher without a GT endorsement said that "he has no training besides his past experiences." Only two teachers from Fair Oaks High School, Bethany, and Robyn, described a different experience. Robyn explained that "support was provided for modifications and suggestions through their subject interventionist if requested." Bethany shared that "they are receiving more information from the state which trickles down to the district level regarding gifted education." She continued to explain that "the new GT coordinator for the district conducted a training for teaching students at the high school level."

The teachers did not feel that school administrators selected teachers to teach Advanced Placement or honors-level classes well. The teachers described various experiences throughout their interviews, with most stating that it was based on who had their GT endorsement. A teacher from all three high schools expressed that teachers are selected through school politics. Gwen, from Laurel Springs High School, explained that "there has been a trend to spread the wealth" amongst teachers, no matter if the other teachers are qualified or have shown success." Greg from Gold River High School said that "a teacher is selected based on what is the easiest way to schedule the course." Another experience expressed by all three high schools is for the teacher to be willing to teach the higher-level courses. Nicole from Fair Oaks High School stated that "she

felt that at this point, they are just looking for a warm body and if you are willing to do it." Nicole also shared that "she had been a teacher for one year when she was asked to teach an honors class." Another experience that was shared by Maggie, a teacher at Fair Oaks High School and Gwen from Laurel Springs High School was that AP and honors-level courses are sometimes offered to new teachers in the district to entice them to take the position at the school; however, they do not know the teacher's ability, or they do not take the required courses for the endorsement, and they will no longer be able to teach the course.

Teacher Experiences

Teachers do not identify students as gifted and talented at the high school level. In the lower grade levels, students are first identified and then enrolled in specific Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) courses. GATE courses offer students opportunities in academic achievement and socioemotional development, enable comprehensive independent learning, and focus on engaging students in higher level and abstract thinking (Miedijensky, 2018). However, at the high school, students do not have to be identified as gifted and talented and any student can take honors and advanced placement courses. At the high school level, many teachers did not express their knowledge of students still receiving gifted and talented services in high school. Sean from Gold River High School explained that "he did not even know that there were services until recently." Lisa from the same school said that "the district requires them to get their GT endorsement but that they do not have gifted and talented at the high school." Throughout the interviews, it seemed as if there was confusion among many teachers as to the academic level of their students in honors and Advanced Placement classes. Teachers also did not express that they had a significant role in identifying students for gifted and talented services. Sean shared that "he does not think high school teachers think about it." Bethany agreed and stated that "students

already come to high school identified." Teachers from every high school explained that instead of identifying students, they use the recommendation process to advise students on which courses they should be taking.

Although teachers reported that they did not receive specific training to recommend students for advanced placement and honors-level classes, they discussed what they use to help them recommend students for higher-level courses. Several teachers stated that they use their own personal experiences with gifted and talented education when identifying students for higher-level courses. Some of these experiences came from being identified as GT themselves, like Bethany. Bethany utilized her firsthand experience of what GATE classes were like and what shared characteristics that she and others had in her gifted and talented classes. Other teachers based their knowledge of gifted and talented education on their own children's experiences being in GATE classes, like Harris and Gwen. Through their interactions with teachers and the characteristics that their children had, they felt this helped them identify the same characteristics in their students. Teri and Pam from Laurel Springs High School, Maggie from Fair Oaks High School, and Sean from Gold River High School all shared that "they could pick out which students are gifted in their classes through their teaching experiences." These teachers felt that they had taught and interacted with enough students throughout their teaching careers to be able to identify students that are gifted. Kristen, a school counselor from Laurel Springs High School, shared in her survey that "she gained her skills of identifying students from the courses she took for her GT endorsement." Nicole and Greg also used their knowledge from their GT courses to help with identification. Julie, Sherry, and Tom, school counselors from the three different high schools, shared that they used data analysis, had no experience with

identifying gifted students, and world knowledge as they had not taken the required courses to obtain the GT endorsement.

Recommendation Practices

During the recommendation process, teachers are presented with a variety of mandates from their individual school administration or from the district level administration as they evaluate students for the next level course. These mandates can be created by the district or the individual departments at each school. The teachers then also have the identifiers, such as student effort, grades, or testing data, that they use to determine whether a student should be in college prep, honors, or advanced placement courses.

District/Department Mandates

As teachers shared the mandates that each individual school required, it became apparent that every department used some type of flow chart that listed the requirements to recommend students for the next level course. For most departments, this flow chart only included the next level course that students would take after successfully completing the course they were currently enrolled in, with no grade or pre-requisite restrictions. This allowed teachers to have more flexibility and utilize more personal evaluation of each student's ability to participate in a higher-level course instead of basing their recommendation solely on a student's grades, testing data, or what courses they had previously taken. Maggie, a science teacher from Fair Oaks High School and Lisa, a science teacher from Gold River High School both explained the strict requirements for students to enter AP Biology. To move to this class, they both explained that "you had to take honors Biology as a 9th grader, and not Earth Science." Maggie elaborated on this and shared that "they would like all 8th grade GT students to go straight in to honors Biology. But the district mandates that Algebra 1 is a prerequisite for honors Biology which

many students do not take till 9th grade." This requirement reduces the number of students that are eligible to take AP Biology.

The teachers discussed in their interviews a variety of mandates that they received from the district or their own departments at their individual schools. These mandates included evaluating students based on their cumulative grades, course prerequisites, and required courses and grades from other subjects and the mandates varied between schools and departments. There were also some teachers that were not aware of any mandates, and therefore did not follow the same procedures as their colleagues in the department. For math courses in the district, the mandates that teachers had to follow when making recommendations for higher-level courses varied from having a specific cumulative grade requirement to not being aware of any mandates at all. Conner shared that at Gold River High School, students must have a cumulative grade of an 85 or higher in the prerequisite course to be recommended for an advanced placement course. Bethany at Fair Oaks High School stated that "she did not know the requirements and invited anyone to take the AP courses."

For the English departments in the district, there was more similarity in the procedures they use in the recommendation process, with primarily evaluating the student's previous class. Robyn, an English teacher at Fair Oaks High School, stated that "due to the number of current levels that they offer (English Essentials, Early College, AP, honors, Read 180, CP) it was too difficult to utilize any mandates." Pam, an English teacher from Laurel Springs High School stated, "they also use course history for their department requirement." At the three high schools, the social studies departments all utilized a flow chart in the recommendation process, however, two of the schools used the flow chart for the sequence of courses while the other had a very detailed flow chart detailing prerequisites, required courses from other subjects, and specific

grades in each course. The social studies departments at Gold River High School and Laurel Springs High School both reported using a flow chart for students, but just based on the next required course. The Social Studies department at Fair Oaks High School utilizes a more detailed flow chart which can be found in Appendix E. Nicole shared that "the flow chart includes prerequisites, required courses from other subjects, and specific grades in each course."

Teacher Identifiers

During the interview process, teachers shared a variety of different identifiers that they used during the recommendation process. Two of the most frequently used identifiers by teachers were effort and grades from other classes. Multiple teachers from every high school mentioned effort during their interviews. Most of the teachers felt that if a student was willing to put forth effort in their class, then they would end up being successful in a higher-level course and would therefore be more likely to recommend them for those courses. Robyn stated,

> I look more at their effort than at their achievements. If I have an average student that works really hard, they will be just as successful as the identified GT and honors level students. The effort is the biggest one I see, particularly at the age I teach.

Nicole stated, "if they are hard-working, she did not want to see them get stuck in a CP class." Greg also shared "he felt that a lot of it is not based on a student being GT, but rather on the student being a hard worker." Bethany stated that "effort makes a big difference in a student's success in honors and AP classes." She elaborated that "some students end up being pushed out of honors classes because they are not doing the work."

Grades are also a big identifier that teachers discussed using during the recommendation process. Multiple teachers discussed that the very first thing they look at when determining which course to recommend a student for is their grades. This includes grades from their current

and previous courses. Teri, Pam, and Gwen, all from Laurel Springs High School shared that they look at grades first. Teri said, “she even looks back at their middle school grades and the teacher they have had to determine if their grades have been inflated.” Maggie said, “if they had good math and English grade, she recommends them for a high-level course.” In addition to the teachers, three school counselors that were surveyed mentioned that they also use grades when discussing higher-level courses with their students. Tom, a school counselor from Gold River High School, said in his survey “he looks for students getting high B’s or better” while Kristen, a school counselor from Laurel Springs High School looks for “prior academic success in the specific discipline.” Julie, a school counselor at Laurel Springs High School, also looks at a student’s grades as an identifier for participation in higher-level classes.

Accessing and evaluating student data is the next most mentioned identifier used by teachers in the recommendation process. The Campbell School District utilizes Enrich, an online software, that stores student testing data from all state testing during a student’s duration in the district. Teachers also have access to PowerSchool, which is a web-based teacher to student information system, where teachers input grades, attendance, input their class recommendations, and school counselors use for scheduling. Students also participate in Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing for mathematics, reading, and language usage starting in elementary school through tenth grade that provides data on a student’s growth. Teachers that utilized data in the recommendation process, look at state testing in Enrich and a student’s MAP scores to determine if a student should be recommended for advanced placement, honors, or college prep level courses. Lisa from Gold River High School, “looks on Enrich, a web-based software program that contains student data, to see their MAP scores, measures students’ academic growth in math and language arts, and scholastic scores to identify student ability in honors or

AP classes.” Harris, Pam, Sean, and Maggie also all rely on Enrich and MAP scores as an identifier for student recommendations. Sherry, a school counselor from Fair Oaks High School, also utilizes Enrich when evaluating students’ readiness for honors courses. In addition to Enrich, comprehension was mentioned several times by teachers. Lisa, Nicole, and Harris all look for comprehension and higher-level thinking skills.

One issue that teachers in the identification process discussed in their interviews is the requirement of identifying students that they have not met. In 2018, the high schools in the Campbell School District transitioned to block scheduling for their students. Fair Oaks High School followed an A-B schedule in which students had eight classes for the entire year and attended their classes every other day. Gold River High School and Laurel Springs High School implemented a four-by-four schedule, where students had four classed the fall semester and then four classes the spring semester. In 2020, Fair Oaks High School transitioned to a four-by-four schedule, having all three high schools following the same schedule. Transitioning to the four-by-four schedule has caused the issue discussed by teachers as they are required to make recommendations for courses in November, yet they do not meet their spring semester students until January. Therefore, they only can use, prior grades and data listed in Enrich to base their recommendations on instead of evaluating each student individually. Lisa stated, “this is a major issue with the high schools now as I have never met my students for the spring semester, but I am still required to make a recommendation for those students.” She said, “she felt she was making an inappropriate recommendation by just looking at their historical grades and test scores." Gwen discussed many of the same issues and stated, “it’s inappropriate to make a decision for a student that she has never met or spoken to.” She stressed “this does not provide

an opportunity to discuss with the students any future career goals or plans to help them succeed in the future."

Underrepresentation of Minority Students

There is an underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes in the Campbell School District. Document analysis of school data and documents (Appendix F) can be used to provide evidence that minority students in Campbell School District are underrepresented in higher-level courses. Teacher interviews and school counselor surveys confirmed the findings from school data based on their observations in the classroom.

Many teachers shared their experiences in the AP classroom in their interviews and reported that there are more Caucasian students than any other ethnic group. The percentage of students from each ethnic group in the school should be similar to the representation in the advanced placement courses. In all three high schools, the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and all other minority ethnic groups, excluding Asian, our underrepresented in advanced placement classes per the data collected from each school, as can be seen in Table 3, 4, and 5. Teacher interviews supported the data with the observations made in their classrooms. Conner, from Gold River High School, stated "in AP courses, he typically sees more Caucasian and Asian than any other minority." Nicole from Fair Oaks High school agreed and stated, "majority of the students in AP classes are White, while Bethany reported that she had one African American in her AP class." Gwen from Laurel Springs High School stated, "courses have more White students.".

Table 3

Students Enrolled in AP Classes at Fair Oaks High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/	American	Two or	Pacific	White

				Latino	Indian	More	Islander	
School	2331	32	625	76	17	74	7	1500
Percent	100%	1.4%	27%	3.3%	0.7%	3.2%	0.3%	64.4%
AP	384	11	35	10	1	8	2	317
Percent	100%	2.9%	9.1%	2.6%	0.3%	2.1%	0.5%	90.4%

Table 4

Students Enrolled in AP Classes at Gold River High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
School	2170	86	922	329	4	329	5	674
Percent	100%	4%	42.4%	15.2%	0.2%	15.2%	2.4%	31.1%
AP	291	34	68	20	4	2	1	162
Percent	100%	11.7%	23.4%	6.9%	1.4%	0.7%	0.3%	55.7%

Table 5

Students Enrolled in AP Classes at Laurel Springs High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
School	3119	32	878	141	35	88	14	1931
Percent	100%	1%	28.2%	4.5%	1.1%	2.8%	0.4%	62%
AP	664	15	81	17	4	15	3	529

Percent	100%	2.3%	12.2%	2.6%	0.6%	2.3%	0.5%	79.7%

At the honors level, teachers experienced less drastic underrepresentation of minority students in higher-level courses; however, minority students were still underrepresented. Per the data and documents collected from each school, as can be seen in Table 6, 7, and 8 Black students are underrepresented in higher-level courses at all three schools, whereas Hispanic students were only underrepresented at Fair Oaks and Gold River High Schools. Bethany and Maggie from Fair Oaks High School reported that "their honors courses were still majority White, but have approximately a quarter of their students of different minorities groups." Lisa from Gold River High school reported that "honors courses are made up of roughly 40% minorities." Greg confirmed that "his honors courses usually have more White students than minorities." At Laurel Springs High School, Gwen explained that minority students represent 30% of her honors classes.

Table 6

Students Enrolled in Honors Classes at Fair Oaks High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
School	2331	32	625	76	17	74	7	1500
Percent	100%	1.4%	27%	3.3%	0.7%	3.2%	0.3%	64.4%
Honors	1245	25	213	39	6	37	5	920
Percent	100%	2%	17.1%	3.1%	0.5%	3%	0.4%	73.9%

Table 7

Students Enrolled in Honors Classes at Gold River High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
School	2170	86	922	329	4	329	5	674
Percent	100%	4%	42.4%	15.2%	0.2%	15.2%	2.4%	31.1%
Honors	1227	82	435	111	15	33	5	546
Percent	100%	6.7%	35.5%	9%	1.2%	2.7%	0.4%	44.5%

Table 8

Students Enrolled in Honors Classes at Laurel Springs High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
School	3119	32	878	141	35	88	14	1931
Percent	100%	1%	28.2%	4.5%	1.1%	2.8%	0.4%	62%
Honors	2242	26	472	105	24	54	13	1543
Percent	100%	1.2%	21.1%	4.7%	1.1%	2.4%	0.6%	69%

Home Influences

Teachers and school counselors felt that home influences play a key role in the underrepresentation of minority students in AP and honors-level courses. The most frequently expressed home influence by teachers in their interviews was the effect of the family. Teachers expressed their concern with a lack of family support and the correlation that that they have

witnessed with family support and enrollment in honors-level courses. It is important to note, that several teachers mentioned that a lack of family support and enrollment in upper-level classes was seen with all ethnic groups and not just with minority students. Robyn stated:

> I think about it a lot and it is my 9th grade African American boys that really struggle. I do not know if it is because it is English class or if it is because they do not have a lot of family support as a lot of them are first generation wanting to go to college and they do not have the people at home that will read to them or with them or help them and they get bogged down with the level of reading and writing.

Lisa and Nicole explained "it has a lot to do with families and whether they push education." Several teachers shared that they did not necessarily have anything to do with ethnic differences because it can be seen with all races. Teri stated:

> She has seen an impact with family status and that when she is building her contact lists for honors-level classes, most of the families are two-parent households, whereas in CP classes, no matter the race, many of the households are single parents or separated. I think the needs of the family and what is happening at home has a lot to do with it.

Nicole shared "the push comes from home and that she would like to believe that if a student wanted to try a higher-level class, that the student's family would support that."

Socio-economic issues were the next most referenced home influence by teachers. Teachers felt that socio-economic levels amongst their students' parents played a large role on whether students are recommended for upper-level high school classes. This is due to parents working multiple jobs and not as home as often and students having to get a job in order to help the family financially. Although it was mentioned that low socio-economic levels can be seen with all ethnic groups, teachers discussed that it is more frequent with their minority families.

Bethany explained, “she feels like many minority parents are working two jobs and do not have the time as they are working too hard to get by.” Gwen also felt that these parents could be working. Maggie stated:

> I do not have the data on this, but it must be related to socioeconomics, as I teach CP, honors, and AP and the work ethic is about the same. The honors kids seem to come from more stable working environments, while listening to some of my CP kids, it is not Mom, Dad, and the white picket fence with two dogs. I would just go along with historically and culturally in our country that the socioeconomic status of minorities, in general, is below that of Caucasians and that bleeds over.

Lisa has a similar opinion as Maggie and shared that unfortunately, "in our country, most people above the poverty line are White and until that can stabilize and get to where it needs to be, that will be a leading factor." Conner emphasized that "lack of financial support for most low-income families leads to families emphasizing jobs instead of careers early in their children's lives rather than education."

Home support and the value of education were also frequently mentioned by teachers. Many teachers found that the level of interaction with parents in advanced placement and honors-level classes is much higher than with parents in their college prep classes. Gwen mentioned, “I can tell a difference of the support from home with my African American students that are in AP classes compared to CP classes.” Both Harris and Bethany supported what Gwen said in that they believed that parents are not as responsive and typically they have less communication and parent-teacher conferences with minority students at the CP level. Lack of home support can also be contributed to a lack of value of education. If a student has to work or take care of younger siblings can affect how they value their education. Teri explained that

where education ranks in terms of whether the students have to work is important. This can affect how a student values education. Nicole also stressed that the importance placed on academics is different and can be a factor.

School Influences

Factors do not just influence the underrepresentation of minority students in AP and honors-level courses in the home. The teachers expressed a variety of school influences that can affect enrollment in higher-level courses. The most discussed school influence was the lack of education in the public. Seven of the 12 teachers that were interviewed all mentioned that they did not feel that the district did a decent job of educating the public about the different programs that are offered at the individual schools and in the district. Robyn stated, “even the Early College program, which was set up for lower-income families, is not being taken advantage of by those groups.” Bethany agreed and stated, “it was her understanding that the Early College program was created for minority, first-generation college students and there were three to five minority students each year that enroll in the program out of 30 students.” Pam, Gwen, and Harris, all from Laurel Springs High School, felt that minority parents do not have all the information to make a choice as to which classes their students should take. Not understanding the system leads to not knowing what opportunities are available for their students.

Many of the teachers discussed in their interviews that there are issues that can arise at the middle school that can affect the number of minority student that take higher-level courses in high school. These issues include a lack of challenge in education leading up to high school and there already being a disparity of minority students in middle school GT classes. Most teachers agreed that more needs to be done to provide opportunities for minority students in middle school to increase the rigor of the curriculum and increase expectations for students. Maggie

argued, by 8th grade, there is already a demographic disparity and that GT kids are being recommended for the honors classes in 9th grade, so any disparity that exists demographically at the middle school will bleed over to the high school. Kristen, a school counselor, stated in her survey, that she also felt that it is due to this demographic disparity, "additional support needs to be increased for minority students to have more success in education earlier on." Conner explained, "in middle school, students have not been challenged to think about concepts and problems." Maggie also felt the same way and described academics in the middle school as "very easy, conceptual stuff, and whether it is at the CP or GT level, students do not know how to study and then cannot work at an honors level when they enter high school." Bethany stated, "the level of expectations is sometimes different with the CP and GT students and that starts in middle school." Harris also felt "it is not fair to never challenge the CP kids and keep them in the same classes." Gwen also argued, "no matter if a student is a minority or not, if students have elevated expectations and they are held to high expectations, students will follow through."

Another topic that emerged as a school influence with the underrepresentation of minority students in higher-level courses is the cultural pressure many minority students deal with at school. Many teachers in their interviews also reported with the underrepresentation of minority students in their classes, students do not have the opportunity to interact with students that look like them, so the desire for them to take or remain in higher-level classes is very low. Robyn, Harris, and Sean all mentioned peer pressure as inhibiting minority students from taking upper-level courses. This is especially true for African American boys. Robyn stated,

> We have so many African American boys that have the peer pressure of "not to be White," and I do not understand why being smart and successful means you are White. But for some of them, that is the culture they are in, and they do not want to be ostracized

> from their culture. That is a hard battle to fight with teens that want so much approval from their friends.

Maggie made a similar statement:

> There is a social aspect with African American boys. If they are in honors-level classes, especially at the 9th-grade level, there is social pressure to not look like a nerd and take CP classes instead of honors. Every year in my CP class, I have African American boys that are smart, and they use all that intelligence to get into trouble because it is more entertaining and it makes them seem cool. I do not even have to look in Enrich to see if they were in GT in 8th grade.

Gwen and Lisa both mentioned that they felt that it has to do with their group of friends. Lisa elaborated by stating, "I do not feel like a lot of minority students had a lot of friends in the upper-level courses, so they did not want to be in those classes." Tom, a school counselor from Gold River High School and Sherry, a school counselor from Fair Oaks High School both agreed with others and said, "their peers are not in the class, so they do not have a desire to stay in the classes."

Increase Enrollment of Advanced Placement and Honors-Level Classes

As teachers and school counselors discussed the recommendation process in their interviews and surveys, it became apparent that many wanted to increase the number of students that are taking AP and honors-level courses. This is especially true for AP classes, as it is a goal of the College Board to increase the number of minority students in their courses. Bethany and Sean both mentioned this in their interviews. Two sub-themes that developed on this topic were outreach and student support.

Student Support

Taking AP and honors-level courses provides a variety of opportunities for students. These courses allow students to prepare for college and possibly earn college credit through their advanced placement classes. Upper-level classes also have a tendency to be more rigorous which pushes student to have to work harder. Maggie explained, “these courses help prepare students for college and can help determine how many will finish college in four years.” Higher-level classes allow students to have someone push them harder than they have been pushed in the past. Nicole stated, “at my school, we base our recommendations on students’ strengths, and providing the opportunity to at least try a higher-level course is important.” In a similar statement, Robyn stated, "any time a student can participate in something that challenges them will only expand their opportunities.”

Providing additional support for students in higher-level courses is another benefit that some teachers discussed. Determining the needs of their minority students is an important factor when teaching. Implementing different strategies, such as additional review sessions, extra time in class, lunch, or after school for students to receive extra help can provide minority students with the extra support, they need to be successful in higher-level classes. Conner stated, “providing more in-class work time for students in higher-level courses is important for students that might need to work to help their families financially.” Teri agreed and shared, “with the right support structure at school, taking higher level courses would be beneficial because knowing they can do it is important. and many students do not realize that they can.” Increasing the opportunities for minority students and allowing them to realize that they can do the work in higher-level courses will increase enrollment. Kristen and Julie, school counselors at Laurel Springs High School, both stated “students need encouragement and support in making decisions about their educational opportunities.” Kristen elaborated on her previous statement and stated,

"there should also be additional support and resources for students in higher-level courses, especially among minority student populations."

Another support that can be offered to students is mentorship. Several teachers discussed in their interview's students having a role model in high school and how it can make a big difference in their academic success. Role models can be current students, alumni, or community members. Having a role model can provide students with someone else to talk to in addition to their family and teachers. Harris stated, "utilizing a role model for a student has someone else setting the expectation and holds their feet to fire because they will not want to let them down." From the interviews and surveys, teachers and school counselors also explained the importance of role models for minority students as it allows them to connect with someone that looks like them and has a similar background and experiences. Gwen also stated, "if a student does not have parental support at home, having a mentor might be helpful." She said, "she felt this is especially true for minority students to have a minority mentor that is successful so that they can show them the ropes." Robyn also spoke about minority students, "having a successful mentor that looks like them; that way they can see that it is possible, and they would feel comfortable talking to them." Several teachers discussed utilizing upperclassmen or recent graduates as they can be seen and known in the schools and have relevant advice that they can provide to the students. Harris also recommended "using upperclassmen as mentors to create positive examples of what they can accomplish and the benefits of taking upper-level courses that will set them up for success in college." Tom, a school counselor, had a similar recommendation but instead stated in his survey, "using recent high school graduates that have taken rigorous courses and have them speak to students of the financial and academic benefits of taking higher level courses would help students."

Outreach

To increase the number of students in AP and honors-level courses, teachers and school counselors overwhelmingly felt there needs to be more outreach to the middle schools in the district. Most shared in their interviews and surveys that this could be accomplished by providing additional programs for the students and parents. Sean explained, “middle school outreach is critical and high schools should have multiple events at the middle school in the evenings and invite parents and students.” Gwen and Bethany both stated, “their schools have already implemented programs for the summer before students enter high school to help students adjust to the rigor of AP courses.” Several teachers discussed implementing a bridge program for middle school students to help acclimate them with the rigorous curriculum that can be found in honors and advanced placement classes. However, some felt that programs needed to happen much earlier than in the summer before high school. Greg suggested that a middle school bridge program should be created specifically for minority students to help prepare them for the rigor of upper-level courses in high school. Nicole felt, “reaching students at an earlier grade can help show students the different paths they can take.” Conner added that after-school programs can be offered for students to help as they prepare and complete the courses.

Most teachers felt that incorporating additional programs and training could be beneficial for all students as well as for parents. Although they discussed their schools holding informational events for parents, they reported that attendance was low. With that being said, they still felt that additional informational opportunities need to be held. This is due to there being a lack of understanding or knowledge of policies and the programs offered by the school. Several teachers felt that if minority students and parents can be informed and educated on the policies and programs offered at the school, enrollment in upper-level classes could increase.

Lisa said, “students need to be aware of the programs to help initiate a drive to take upper-level courses.” Robyn shared, “there need to be programs that educate the students and parents on what possibilities are there.” Gwen also stated, “just knowing the system and understanding how it works can be beneficial and provide more opportunities.” Harris also felt, knowing the school policies can educate parents on the different opportunities. He stated:

> Minority students need to believe that they can do it. I feel like schools today are looking for minority students to take these upper-level classes and complete the Early College program and other pathways to be more successful in better jobs. Is it that they do not know, understand, or are informed of the programs?

Sherry, a school counselor, agreed and said in her survey, “parents need to be informed of the potential benefits of advanced classes.” In order to increase the presence of parents at the additional programs and training, teachers felt that the amount of advertisement that is needed to let parents know when the events are taking place. Pam and Sean both felt, “there needs to be more advanced placement and gifted and talented nights to answer questions of parents.” Bethany explained:

> At my school, they have been trying to implement new strategies and are making videos for every AP class and asked honors classes at the high school to show the videos, but realized that maybe they really should be showing these videos to CP classes as honors students typically know that they are available.

Kristen, a school counselor, felt, “counselors could be marketing advanced placement and honors courses more in their IGP meetings with parents of minority students.”

Increasing the number of minority students in AP and honors-level courses in high school is also important. Not only is it a priority of the College Board, which Sean and Bethany both

mentioned, but it also adds more diversity to the AP and honors courses. Teachers that felt they had more diversity in their classes, contributed it intentionally inviting students to take their classed. This occurred through actual invitation as well as having conversation with students and encouraging them take on the challenge of the course. Conner felt, “inviting and encouraging minority students to further their education in higher-level classes would, in the long run, have students focus more on careers rather than jobs and would help higher-level careers become more diverse.” Gwen and Bethany both believe in inviting minority students into their courses. Gwen stated, “her AP courses have had a higher number of more minority students taking the class due to the invitations because they felt more inclined to take it based solely on the invitation versus discussing their GPA and grades.”

Collaboration of Stakeholders

During the recommendation process, multiple stakeholders participate, and some more than others can influence the outcome of where the student is placed. Teachers and school counselors shared during their interviews and surveys their experiences collaborating with other teachers, school counselors, administrators, parents, and students. It is important to note that every student in school in South Carolina must complete an Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) with a school counselor each year. The parent and student are both invited; however, it is not mandatory that the parent attend. Any information pertaining to graduation is sent to the parents after the scheduled time if they do not attend.

Parents and Students

From the interviews, it became apparent that very little communication occurs between the parent and teacher during the recommendation process. It was stressed by most teachers, that communication with parents is important, however eight of the twelve teachers did not typically

reach out to them. Bethany, Pam, and Gwen discussed AP parent night and a rising 9th grader night to discuss courses with parents if they attend, but individual conversation about students with their parents is not occurring at the event. Gwen shared, "I hold an individual parent night for my students before school begins to answer any questions, they might have about the advanced placement class." Bethany, Harris, and Sean were in the small group that discussed actually contact parents if they have any concerns or questions regarding which class the student should be recommended for. Robyn also said, "it is important to have those conversations with the parents as they do not always get to see the student's behaviors in school, so there needs to be some discussion." Like many others, Conner stated, "there is little communication happening between parents and teachers."

Communication and collaboration between teacher and student are much more frequent with the recommendation process. All the teachers mentioned at some point during their interviews; they are having an individual conversation with their current students to discuss which classes would be best for them to take. This was found beneficial because teachers felt they could help guide their students to the correct classes. Some teachers took it a step further and sent invitation to their own and other student they did not teach to invite them to take the class. Julie said, "once a student completes their class, teachers recommend them for their next class since they are aware of their abilities." Bethany explained, "she sets aside a day of class to speak with each student and let them know where she thinks they are placed." She and Maggie both inquire about what career field their students want to pursue to help place them in the best courses for their future. Gwen and Sean utilize an invite process to recruit students to take their AP courses. Gwen reported, "this helped add an additional ten students to her class that wouldn't have previously enrolled in the course."

Another factor that plays a role with parents in the recommendation process is that they can complete a parent override to determine where their students are placed. A parent override can move a student to a higher-level and an entirely different course then what was recommended by the teacher. For example, if a teacher recommended a student for college prep Biology, but the parent felt they should take Honors Biology, the parent would fill out the override form and turn it in to the School Counseling Office. The override form explicitly states that the parent would like to override the teacher recommendation and "I understand that by overriding a teacher-recommended course, I am agreeing that my child will remain in the replacement course for the entire year, regardless of their progress (Appendix G)." Many teachers felt that the language on the override form intimidates students from taking the higher-level courses as well as allows parents to push their students in to classes they are not prepared for. Greg explained, "at the high school level, parents can override to get their student into the honors classes." Greg added, "this is often not because they feel they are gifted but because they do not want their kids with the bad kids in CP." Greg and Robyn both expressed concerns with this as they felt that it puts the student in a tricky situation if they are not capable or willing to the more rigorous work. Bethany elaborated more on the course override procedure, "if they complete an override, then the student cannot drop down to the lower-level if the student is not successful." It was also found that although the language on the form states that students cannot withdrawal from a replacement class some are able to move to another class. Bethany and Harris stated, "parents have a lot of power in the district, and if they push hard enough, the issue will be taken care of very quickly."

Although some teachers mentioned contacting parents to collaborate, it was surprising that most did not. Most of the school counselors surveyed shared that they believed that these

conversations are happening between teachers and parents. However, through the interview process, it was found that most did not. Tom explained in his survey, “teachers make their recommendations to students, parents, and counselors. Then the counselors follow up with parents and students in their IGP meetings.” Sherry also said the same thing as Tom in her survey, “there are conversations that occur with the teachers, students, and parents to decide which classes are the best fit.” Kristen added in her interview, “teachers make recommendations, but parents can request an override to a higher-level class.” Tom and Kristen stated, “during the IGP meetings they will encourage students to attempt honors or AP courses.”

School Faculty and Staff

There is very little collaboration that occurs between administrators, school counselors, and other teachers during the recommendation process. However, several teachers discussed in their interviews their concerns that school administrators have the ability to override their recommendations with spending very little time with the students. Conner stated, “administrators, like parents, can override a teacher’s recommendation for a student.” Teachers shared that they are the only people who have direct access to the students and their educational progress throughout the year, and they are often undermined by what the administrator wants. It was also found that some administrators did not fully understand the requirements and class pathways for their departments, which leads to issues when planning the students’ classes for the following year. Maggie stated:

> In the past, the department typically had an administrator that came from the same field of study, and they understood the different pathways a student could take. However, now they do not have anyone at her school, and there is a misconception about what is needed

for students to be successful in those majors in college. She explained that there is a large disconnect.

Teachers then reflected during their interviews on their collaboration with school counselors. Overall, majority of the teachers were concerned with the misinformation that was provided by the school counselors during the student's individual graduation plan (IGP) meetings. It was discussed that many students are encouraged to take less rigorous classes during their senior year by school counselors, when they should still be taking higher-level courses, especially for students that will be enrolling in college in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) major. Maggie shared that students are being misinformed by their school counselors to take easier classes when they get to their senior year, as it is not preparing them for college. During the interviews, many teachers discussed the importance of meeting with school counselors to let them know what departments policies are for the recommendation process and to let them know the expectations for higher level classes. When this does occur, they are hopeful that it is beneficial in assisting the process. Robyn stated, "I think it is important for teachers to talk to counselors during the recommendation process as it seems that they do not know all of the options available for students and what they can and cannot take." Bethany and Lisa both stated, "the school counselors have received their department flow charts and hope that they are followed." Gwen stated:

> School counselors at the high school know what she expects, and school counselors provide that information to their students. Some school counselors are strong and encourage minority students, especially if the counselor is a minority and understands the process. The more effective and engaged the counselor is, they tend to be more involved

with the students. One of the biggest issues I have found is lack of experience in the position and knowledge of the courses offered.

From the interview process, it became apparent that little communication occurs between teachers in different departments and sometimes within the same departments. Within the social studies department at Fair Oaks High School and Gold River High School, Nicole and Gwen discussed vertical planning with their fellow teachers to determine the correct placement for students overall but not specifically about one student. Harris stated, “in his math department, he will ask an honors teacher what their expectations are as he has had very little interaction with those classes and GT students.” Teri explained, “her school is just too big, and it is too difficult to make connections with other teachers, so she primarily just relies on PowerSchool.” Conner shared, “very little communication happens between teachers at his school as well.”

Outlier Data and Findings

This section contains one unexpected theme. The use of multicultural curriculum in the classroom evoked an array of opinions from teachers during their interviews. Many teachers discussed that there is no room in the curriculum to teach multicultural education and that they teach strictly to their standards. This was especially true in the math and science departments. Bethany and Maggie, both from Fair Oaks High School, stated, “there is nothing in their standards about multiculturalism, so they do not cover it.” Lisa and Teri from the science departments at Gold River High School and Laurel Springs High School shared that at a minimum they try to include scientists from different ethnic backgrounds as well as women. When discussing multiculturalism with the teachers they discussed a variety of benefits and disadvantages of including it in their curriculum.

Benefits

Teachers overwhelmingly felt that any time students can see people that they can relate to it is a good thing. The use of multicultural education was well perceived by teachers and felt that it would especially help their minority students as they would create a more inclusive environment. Robyn expanded on this and stated, “students will culturally link to people that look like them.” She provided the example of a book series in her classroom that has African American and Hispanics males as the lead characters. She stated, “when my minority males have a choice on what they can read, they always grab these books.” Conner stated, “anytime students see adults that are similar in appearance to them, their culture and upbringing would inspire them and make them more engaged.” Not only would it engage students in the curriculum, but Lisa also felt, it would create a more inclusive environment for her minority students. Greg stated, “not only would they feel more included, most importantly they would feel like they belong in those classes.”

Disadvantages

There were very few disadvantages of multicultural education that teachers discussed in their interviews, besides just acknowledging how minority students could be affected by it. Nicole stated, “teaching multiculturalism in the classroom could lead to students possibly feeling marginalized and picked on.” She also shared that “depending on how it was taught could lead to different perceptions, especially in the current school climate.” Sean explained that “if a teacher is sharing information about multiculturalism in the classroom who is not caring then students could perceive the instruction as something the teachers have to do.”

Research Question Responses

The following section answers the central research question and the three sub-questions. Data codes and themes from the previous section were used to help answer the research questions.

Central Research Question

How do teachers describe the recommendation process for academic placement at high school?

At the high school level, teachers have a little more freedom when recommending students for their classes. Each fall, teachers recommend their students from that year for their classes for the following school year. Teachers make these recommendations for others to see using PowerSchool. When describing the recommendation process, Bethany stated:

> I take a day, meet with my students, and let them know what I think is the best placement for them. I also ask them what career field they want to go into. This has a dual purpose as I can push them into an AP Statistics class, and it also increased my AP numbers. I also feel at the high school level that it is less about placing students in honors and AP courses and more about parent choice. It is open enrollment and parents can say they want their kids in an honors class and they can take the class.

Maggie describes the recommendation process in a similar way, she stated:

> Before I recommend students for a class, I talk to them about what they want to do and if they want to go into the STEM field. I tell all my kids that if you want to go to a four-year college, you need to take an AP class in any field before you graduate. I push them if they are in CP and encourage them to take honors classes.

Kristen, a school counselor, and a prior teacher said, “here teachers make recommendations for levels of classes, but parents can request an override to advance to a higher-level class than

recommended if they disagree with the teacher. I will also make recommendations during the GP process." Sherry, a school counselor, described the process "as a conversation with the teachers, students, and parents to decide what classes will be the best fit for the upcoming school year."

Sub-Question One

What practices are used to recommend students for honors and advanced placement level classes at the high school?

Teachers discussed various methods they use during the recommendation process. The most widely mentioned practice is utilizing students' grades from other courses and the effort they exhibit in their current class with them. Gwen said that "the first thing that uses is grades." Pam and Teri said, "they go back and look at grades from previous classes as well." At times, teachers will use specific classes to analyze their abilities. Maggie, a science teacher, stated, "I look to see what level they are in for their math classes and also look at their English grades for comprehension." Student effort is another contributing factor when recommending students. Robyn said, "effort is the biggest factor, especially with the age I teach." She also said, "if I have an average student that works hard but has not been identified as GT, I will recommend them because most likely they will be successful." Nicole shared, "work ethic is vital, and you still need to work even if you are brilliant. She also stated, "if they are a hard-working kid, I don't want to see them get stuck in CP classes." Pam stated, "I have kids in honors classes that have hit a C average on their tests, but they have a good work ethic and need help with study skills, but I can see the potential in them." For most teachers, effort and grades are the leading practices they use when recommending students.

Besides grades, teachers and school counselors utilize data they can find in Enrich. Using this student database allows teachers to evaluate student potential and ability levels. Lisa said, "I

look at Enrich to see their MAP scores in reading and math to see if they are capable of understanding concepts at a higher level." Pam also agreed with Lisa and stated, "reading comprehension is very important when recommending students to higher-level classes." Sherry, a school counselor, stated, "data analysis of test scores is the number one practice I use."

Sub-Question Two

What are the best practices to encourage students to participate in higher-level classes at high schools?

During the interview and survey process, there were various recommendations made by teachers and school counselors to increase enrollment in AP and honors-level courses. These recommendations fell under the sub-themes of outreach and student support. Teachers felt that adding innovative programs and training could help encourage participation. Bethany explained, "Fair Oaks High School already has implemented a camp for incoming 9th grade AP students to help acclimate them to the school and the program." Robyn felt that "parents need to be educated more on what AP and honors classes are." She elaborated, "many students and parents come into high school not even knowing that if they are failing one course, they do not fail for the entire school year." Conner recommended that "after-school programs could also benefit students that can be successful but need a little more assistance." Sherry, a school counselor, stated, "educating parents on the benefits of higher-level classes would also be beneficial." Advertising can help market the AP and honors-level courses. Currently, all the high schools offer an AP and rising 9th grader event; however, most of the parents that attend these events already know about the different programs. Bethany explained that "creating videos and sharing them with students and parents could help encourage students."

Many teachers felt that reaching out to the students while still in middle school could recruit more students to enroll in higher-level courses. Greg recommended “creating a bridge program for students, especially minority students, to help prepare them for the classes.” Sean explained that “providing mock lessons for teachers at the middle school could help spark interest and give the students a sense that they can do the assigned work.” Lisa stated, “at the middle school, teachers need to start providing opportunities for students. Just because they are not identified as GT, they can still be challenged with a rigorous curriculum to prepare them for these types of classes at the high school.” Creating different opportunities and encouragement for their students was a topic that many teachers discussed. Nicole and Robyn both said, “participating in something more difficult than you are used to will only motivate you to do better.”

Student mentorship was another method mentioned by teachers to encourage students to take higher-level courses. They felt “this was especially true when attempting to encourage more minority students to enroll in AP and honors-level classes.” Including successful working adults, recent graduates, and current juniors and seniors as mentors can help students visualize themselves being successful, and they can see people like themselves that have gone through similar experiences. Mentors can discuss their experiences in higher-level classes and how they have benefited from them. Tom said, “through mentorship, students can see the financial and academic benefits from taking the courses, which can help them realize that they can do it too.” Harris had similar statements as Tom in which he said, “having role models can create positive examples of what students can accomplish and will help set them up for success in college.”

Sub-Question Three

What are the practices of collaboration and communication that take place with colleagues, school counselors, students, and parents during the recommendation process?

Many teachers discussed a need for more collaboration between colleagues and school counselors other than placing their recommendations in PowerSchool. Teri said, “the school was too big to connect with other teachers or counselors.” Gwen teaches mostly 9th graders, so she stated, “she does not have access to the student's prior teachers to collaborate with.” Most of the collaboration between teachers was discussed between teachers in their departments. Harris said, “he will reach out to the next class-level honors teacher to understand their expectations of that class.” Gwen and Nicole, social studies teachers at different schools, stated, “they do more vertical placement and will collaborate with the teachers in the next course.” Collaboration with school counselors seemed to be even less. Bethany said there was not much communication with school counselors. Gwen stated, “if the school counselor is experienced and understands the process, more communication occurs with the teachers.” Teri stated, “typically, only if there is a problem with a recommendation does a school counselor reach out to a teacher.”

Teachers communicate the most with their students regarding which classes they feel the student should be recommended for next. Bethany stated, “typically, teachers will take a day to meet with their students to discuss what their recommendation will be.” Maggie stated, “she also discusses their future college plans to ensure that they are taking the correct classes.” Lisa said, “she even advises her students for their other classes and will tell them to go talk to their other teacher to see if they will recommend them for a higher-level class if that is what they are interested in.” Tom, a school counselor, stated, “once teachers put their recommendation in PowerSchool and he meets with the student during their IGP, he will have the student go back and talk to the teacher if they are interested in taking another course.” Gwen and Sean both

discussed sending invitations to students to encourage them to take AP courses. A few teachers discussed communicating with parents regarding their students' recommendations. Bethany stated, "if there is a disconnect between her and a student about a class, she will reach out to the parent." She also stated, "there have been times when a parent has contacted her." Harris stated, "he would reach out to parents if there is an issue, while Conner shared, "there is little communication happening with parents at his school."

Summary

Through document analysis, teacher interviews, and school counselor surveys, a plethora of information was discovered about the recommendation process. The main themes that evolved during data collection were the collaboration of stakeholders, GT services and support, increasing AP and honors enrollment, recommendation practices, and the underrepresentation of minority students in honors and AP classes provided insight into how to improve the process. Many teachers identified that they specifically look for students earning good grades in their classes and putting forth effort in their classes to be recommended for AP and honors-level classes. Many teachers discussed that collaboration between stakeholders is less prevalent than others think; however, communication with students and making recommendations based on their interests and future goals are. Through document analysis, teacher interviews, and school counselor surveys, it was recognized that there is an underrepresentation of minority students in upper-level classes and that many teachers are aware of this issue and trying to take action to increase minority students in their classes.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this embedded multiple-case study was to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. This chapter includes a summary of the themes discussed in Chapter Four, an interpretation of the data, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research study and includes the most important findings.

Summary of Findings

A multiple-case study involving the Campbell School District occurred to answer the research questions of this study. The participants included four teachers and one school counselor from Fair Oaks High School, four teachers and one school counselor from Gold River High School, and four teachers and two school counselors from Laurel Springs High School. The multiple case study provided a large amount of data for analysis via teacher interviews, school counselor surveys, and document analysis. This section includes each research question and the findings related to each question. The findings had the participants describe their experiences about the recommendation process in recommending students for advanced placement and honors-level courses.

The data collected through teacher interviews, school counselor surveys, and document analysis generated five themes that addressed the research questions. The first theme related to teachers experiences with gifted and talented services in the district and the support provided by the district to identify and educate gifted and talented students. The second theme focused on the

recommendation practices with sub-themes of district/department mandates and identifiers used by teachers. The recommendation process is used to determine student placement for the upcoming school year. At the high school, the core teachers (math, English, social studies, and science) recommend each student for the next course in their subject, as well as if the student should be in college prep, honors, or advanced placement. The third theme centered around the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes with sub-themes of home and school influences. The fourth theme dealt with increasing enrollment in advanced placement and honors-level classes with sub-themes of student support and outreach. The fifth theme related to the collaboration of stakeholders to diversify student representation with sub-themes of positive and negative collaboration. During the recommendation process collaboration can occur between administrators, other teachers, parents, and students.

Central Research Question

How do teachers describe the recommendation process for academic placement at high school?

Participants described the recommendation process as a process in which they enter into the web-based software application PowerSchool which class they think the student should take in the next school year. This process is carried out by every teacher in the high school for their current students, whether it is a core class (math, English, science, social studies) or an elective class. As teachers prepare to make their recommendation of classes for the upcoming school year, many teachers described meeting with individual students to discuss which classes they are interested in taking and what course the teacher feels will be a good fit. This is also a time that teachers inquire about what field they would like to go into after high school. With this information, teachers feel they can help their students select the right classes to enroll in. Teacher

will also consider any course requirements that are mandated by the district or their departments, such as a certain course sequence or numerical grade requirement, and will also use their own indicators, if any, to determine the level of class they will recommend their students for. In some situations, a few teachers discussed that if there was an issue with what they thought would be the best course for the students versus what the students wanted to take, they will reach out to their parents. Once teachers have made their decision, they enter the course in the recommendation section of PowerSchool for each individual student that they teach or will teach in the current school year.

Once the recommendation process has been completed, students and their parents are invited to attend their yearly IGP meeting by their school counselor to discuss their individual educational and career goals as well as their recommended classes for the upcoming school year. At this time, the school counselors will register the student for the recommended courses. If a student or parent does not agree with the recommendation made by a teacher, the school counselor will tell them to speak to the specific teacher about the recommendation and see if they will be willing to change their recommendation, whether it is for a different course or a different level. If the teacher is not willing to change their recommendation, then parents have the option to override the recommendation. Parents can override the selection for the class they can take and at whichever level, college prep, honors, or advanced placement, they want. This is different than in elementary and middle schools, where students need to be identified as Gifted and Talented to take the higher-level classes. The participants expressed their concerns about the recommendation process in which they feel that in the high schools, it is less about recommending students and more about parent choice, which they feel negates their

responsibility of helping their students select the most appropriate course for them that they will be successful in completing.

Sub-Question 1

What practices are used to recommend students for honors and advanced placement level classes at the high school?

The participants described various practices they use to recommend students for honors and advanced placement classes at the high school. These practices included student effort, grades, comprehension levels, accessing data from the software application Enrich and PowerSchool, and district mandates. For most teachers, effort and grades were the leading practices utilized in the recommendation process. Effort includes how hard-working a student is in the class. If they are completing all of their classwork and homework and turning all of their assignments in on time, teachers are more likely to recommend them for a higher-level class, even if they do not have any other identifiers for those classes. Several teachers discussed that just willing to work hard will corelate to the student being successful in an advanced placement or honors-level class. Many teachers said that they like to look at their current grades in their classes but also their prior course grades to determine if they will be successful in advanced placement and honors-level courses. Teachers are typically looking for grades of an A or B to recommend students for higher-level classes, especially in their math and English courses.

Besides grades and effort, teachers and school counselors explained that they look at student test scores in Enrich and PowerSchool. Teacher's access, Enrich, PowerSchool, and a student's MAP scores in reading and math to see if they are capable of understanding concepts at a higher level. A student's ability to have a higher reading comprehension score can corelate to a student being more successful in higher-level classes as there is typically a large amount of

independent reading in these classes. Teachers also have to adhere to any district or department mandates when recommending students for higher-level courses. Science teachers reported that they must follow strict mandates that determine what course a student will take as a ninth grader. For example, Algebra 1 is a requirement for students to take honors Biology, however, most students do not take Algebra until they are in ninth grade. This mandate affects the number of students that can be enrolled in the course and therefore affects a student's academic path for the remainder of their years in high school. Departments within the high school can also place mandates on which students can be recommended for higher level classes. These can include specific numerical grades as well completion of prerequisite courses. Through their description of the practices used in the recommendation process, teachers described that they use many more tools than just looking at whether the student has already been identified as GT.

Sub-Question 2

What are the best practices to encourage students to participate in higher-level classes at high schools?

The participants described the sub-themes of outreach and student support as the best practices to encourage students to participate in higher-level classes at high schools. Creating innovative programs and providing additional training for students could encourage participation in higher-level courses. Teachers described a summer enrichment program for rising ninth graders that is currently in place at one high school to help prepare students with the skills needed to be successful in advanced placement classes. Many teachers felt that parents need to be educated more on what AP and honors classes are as they felt that they were not aware of the benefits of taking the courses. At one school, a teacher holds a parent night to inform them of the expectations of their course. It was discussed by teachers that by reaching out to the middle

schools, parents and students would feel that they have more opportunities and will be more likely to enroll in higher-level classes. In the district, each high school hosts a rising ninth-grader night as well as an AP night to advertise and reach out to district middle schools.

Sub-Question 3

What are the practices of collaboration and communication that take place with colleagues, school counselors, students, and parents during the recommendation process?

Many participants discussed the need for more collaboration between the different stakeholders. It was found that teachers communicate most with their students during the recommendation process. Most teachers discussed meeting individually with their students to discuss their correct placement and advise them on which classes are needed for their desired college major. An increase in the collaboration between teachers and school counselors in the recommendation process needs to occur in the schools. Several teachers expressed their frustration with the lack of understanding by the school counselors of their courses and programs by the school counselors. Additional training and working with the teachers can help alleviate this problem and better understand the school courses when they meet with parents during students' annual IGP meetings.

Discussion

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending students for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. Utilizing the invitational theory, this multiple case study explored the processes and experiences of 12 teachers and four school counselors. The findings of this study contribute to the previous research on the teacher recommendation process and the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level classes. The following discussion reveals how

the findings of the study aligned with the theoretical and empirical literature related to the phenomenon.

Theoretical Discussion

In this multiple case study, the invitational theory was selected for the conceptual framework used to explore the phenomenon. The invitational theory (1978) was introduced by Purkey and argued that learning is enhanced and achieved when students are encouraged and invited to participate in an educational setting (Haigh, 2011; Novak et al., 2014; Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Siegel, 2013;). The "theory advocates for different educational programs and services that focus on human relationships, improved physical environments, and respectful systems in which all people, regardless of culture, ethnicity, sex, gender, or other diversity factors, can thrive" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 28). The participants viewed the recommendation process as an opportunity to talk to their students and help them decide the best level and course to take in the upcoming year. Focusing on the human relationship with their students helped them feel that the teachers are invested in their education.

Purkey and Schmidt (1990) discussed four different invitational levels: intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting. Purkey and Novak (1996) explained that often, schools and other organizations unintentionally discriminate, degrade, and dehumanize groups by continuing to use traditional or outmoded policies and programs. Unintentionally disinviting students is typically target-driven and has good intentions by following policies and procedures. This can be seen as a lack of confidence in learners that are being disinvited (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Some participants discussed the policies and procedures that needed to be followed as an inhibitor for students to take upper-level classes at the high school. This either affected students as they entered high school as 9th graders

or moving from one grade to the next. The study supported the theory that there are typically good intentions when implementing policies, such as grade cutoffs for various levels, but this eliminates evaluating students' abilities individually. When intentionally inviting students to academic opportunities, educators seek to empower, engage, and energize students and encourage them to work to their potential (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). Several advanced placement teachers discussed not having any requirements to take their class, with some even sending out special invitations to students. For these courses, there was a higher number of minority students taking the class due to the invitations. This is because the students were more inclined to take the course because they were invited by a specific teacher versus being evaluated strictly for their GPA and grades.

Equity can be evaluated using the existing structure of the invitational theory as the theory is meant to ensure that every student has access to participate in programs implemented by schools (Moeller et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007). In this study, participants discussed that they rely more on a student’s effort or work ethic when they evaluate whether a student should be recommended for a higher-level class versus only relying on the student being previously identified as gifted and talented or having higher test scores. Specifically, results from this study suggest that effort and work ethic is the number one attribute that teachers look at during the recommendation process. Therefore, teachers from this study do not rely simply on prior identification of giftedness or test results to recommend students for AP and honors-level classes. Prior literature for the invitational theory (1978) does not specifically discuss the recommendation process for higher-level courses at the high school; it does however include discussions about including policies, programs, and processes that intentionally or unintentionally are disinviting (Purkey & Novak, 2015; Schmidt, 2004). For example, punitive

approaches, such as a cut-off score on state-mandated test tend to intentionally or unintentionally disinvite students from participating in these experiences (Purkey & Novak, 2015; Schmidt, 2004). Although there are still situations where equity can be challenged in higher-level classes, this study has found that teachers invite students to higher-level classes using a variety of practices no matter a student's race. However, when teachers formally invite students to take their classes, they have experienced a larger number of minority students enrolling in the courses. This study contributed to the research on the theory, as it focused on the effect that teachers can have during the recommendation process by inviting students to participate in the advanced placement and honors-level courses.

Empirical Discussion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. This study aligned with much of the empirical literature on this topic and helped fill in any gaps that existed with the recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school. These gaps consisted mainly of literature that discussed the recommendation process at the high school level as most research discussed the identification and teacher recommendation for gifted and talented services in elementary schools. The extensive literature (Beard, 2019; Bernhardt, 2018; Corwith, 2018; Crawford, Snyder, et al., 2020; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Mathijssen et al., 2021; Novak and Jones, 2021; Russell, 2018; Siegle et al., 2016; Worrell et al., 2019) and this study indicate an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted classrooms and the underlying factors contributing to this issue. In this study, the teachers and school counselors discussed the processes and their experiences of the teacher recommendation process. The themes that emerged across the cases presented the

teacher's perceptions and experiences in recommending students for advanced placement and honors-level classes. The following sections show how this study and its findings confirmed, diverged from, and extended the existing literature.

Minority Representation in Gifted and Talented Education Classes

Data from the Office for Civil Rights (2015) reported that across the United States, the representation in gifted education is inequitable, with African Americans making up 15.4% of the country's total school population and only 8.5% represented in gifted programs and Hispanic students counting for 25.8% of the entire school population with 18.1% in gifted and talented programs. The data collected in this study aligned with the Office of Civil Rights findings of the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and talented programs. At Fair Oaks High School, African Americans make up 27% of the student body, while only 17.1% of African American students are enrolled in honors-level classes. Hispanic/Latino students comprise 3.3% of the student body, while 3.1% are enrolled in honors-level courses. At Gold River High School, African American students make up 42.4% of the student body, while only 35.5% of African American students are enrolled in honors-level classes. Hispanic/Latino students make up 15.2% of the student body, while only 9% are enrolled in the honors level. At Laurel Springs High School, African American students make up 28.2% of the student body, while only 21.1% of African American students are enrolled in honors-level classes. Hispanic/Latino students make up 4.5% of the student body, while only 4.7% are enrolled in AP courses.

Another alignment of the findings of the study to the data from the Office for Civil Rights was that the educators themselves perceived the underrepresentation of minority students in their advanced placement and honors-level classes. All of the teachers that were interviewed that currently teach advanced placement classes reported that majority of their students are White

and that they have an occasional Latino student. Teachers reported that at the honors-level classes, the disparity of minority students is not as drastic; however, majority of the students are still White. At the college prep level, teachers felt that their classes had more diversity and at times, had more African American and Hispanic students than White students. This observation was echoed by many of the participants.

Standardized Testing and Screening

Students are typically identified for gifted and talented services by conducting standardized tests. In addition to IQ tests, many states use state-mandated tests to label students as gifted (Luria et al., 2016). State-mandated tests assess if students have mastered the material taught throughout the school year and often alert school staff to send their names for a gifted evaluation (Luria et al., 2016). Tests are given annually, beginning in third grade, and typically look at students exceeding the 80th percentile on the tests for giftedness (Luria et al., 2016). The findings diverged from Luria et al. (2016) as the identification of students for gifted and talented students occurs before students enter high school, so there was little to no discussion by the participants about identifying students for gifted and talented services. Many participants felt that if their students had the characteristics of a gifted and talented student, they would have already been identified for gifted and talented services through testing before they entered high school. The study found that high school teachers generally are not asked to identify students for GATE. Once students have entered high school, students entering advanced placement and honors-level classes would only occur through teacher recommendations and not through standardized testing.

Teacher Perception and Recommendations

Teacher recommendations are another significant part of the referral process for identifying gifted students. In elementary schools, McBee (2006) describes the process required

by most schools as first to receive a referral from a teacher before any formal testing can be conducted. Teacher referrals can vary between schools, districts, and states in their formality and can be as simplistic as a teacher recommendation or student responses on a formal teacher-rating instrument (McBee, 2006; McBee et al., 2016). Teacher referrals provide a picture of a student's performance in the classroom, which a test does not illustrate (Siegle et al., 2010). At the high school level, there is no formal testing for students to be enrolled in advanced placement and honors-level courses, and it is based solely on teacher recommendations. Due to a different process at the high school level, participants' experiences differed from previous research.

However, whether at the elementary, middle, or high school level, teachers still serve as gatekeepers to higher-level classes and can either create a barrier or an entry point (Novak & Jones, 2021). Brown et al. (2005) argue that teachers' experience level can also play a role in gifted identification. Experienced teachers will look for various skills, including individual expression and contextual variables, when identifying students (Russell, 2018). Experienced teachers will use and expand the definition of giftedness when identifying students (Schroth & Helfer, 2009). There is little research on the teacher recommendation process at the high school level. The findings have extended the research on this topic as teachers are not looking specifically to label students as gifted but instead look for the ability of students to be successful in the more rigorous courses at the advanced placement and honor level. All the teachers that participated in the study had been teaching for more than five years, and all currently or previously had taught an advanced placement or honors level course. Only one teacher, who is currently teaching an AP course, had not completed the coursework for their gifted and talented endorsement. Four participants focused on students' contextual variables and described the level of comprehension they look for when evaluating students for higher-level courses. Student effort

was not discussed in the research that influenced teacher perceptions and recommendations but was heavily discussed by the participants. Many teachers look more for student effort than at student achievements on test scores. The teachers felt that if they had an average student that works hard, they will be just as successful as the identified GT student in the honors classes.

In this study, participants also discussed the significant impact that parent overrides can have on the teacher recommendation process. This is an extension of the research in elementary and middle school; parents can request that their students are tested for giftedness, but they cannot have their children placed in GT classes if they do not test into the program. Many of the teachers felt strongly that they have direct access to the student's educational progress throughout the year but they are often undermined by parent's wants. Parent choice can also harm the student. Teachers felt that with parent choice, it is typically that they do not want their kids in the class with the bad kids. The students then get placed in honors classes, whether they are mentally, emotionally, or academically prepared for the class. If a parent disagrees with a teacher's recommendation, they can override, and the student can advance to a higher-level course.

Cultural Differences

Besides teacher nominations and standardized testing, students can be identified for gifted services through parental nominations. Crawford, Snyder, et al. (2020) and Yosso (2005) argued that this process is dependent on the students' contact at school that can provide information to them and their parent's skills for maneuvering educational programs. This study confirmed these findings, as many participants said that some parents do not know or understand the various levels of classes offered at the high school. Most teachers felt that the schools and district do not do a good job educating the public about the different programs being offered to

students. Other teachers did not think that parents have all of the information they need to make a choice about the different programs that are offered. One misconception that a participant mentioned was that some parents think students need to be GT identified to take honors and AP classes.

Alexander and Schnick (2008) and Gentry et al. (2008) argued that minority parents, especially those who speak English as a second language, find it challenging to communicate with teachers and schools, and the achievement of these parents also adds to the discrimination of these students from being identified as gifted. It is unlikely that a "disenfranchised, low socioeconomic status, uneducated, or an ethnic minority, would have the nerve or the understanding" to question authority and fight for their child to be tested or referred for services (Gonzalez et al., 2000; Ramos, 2010, p. 152). Participants echoed these findings and felt that minority parents would not fight to have their students placed in higher-level classes at the high school through parent nomination. This is especially true when students are not allowed to move down from the higher-level class if they are not successful.

Academic Tracking

Tracking consists of student classroom placement, teacher assignment, and curriculum access based on a criterion of presumed ability and prior achievement from achievement test scores, teacher observations, and classroom performance (Beard, 2019). Bernhardt (2018) and Oakes (2005) found that students who have entered high school in low-track classes will typically finish in low-track classes as the path created for students when they enter will follow to the end of high school. Tracking can influence a student's trajectory in high school as well as their post-secondary and employment plans (Adelman, 1999; Bernhardt, 2014a; Choy et al., 2000; King, 1996). This study corroborated the research as participants reported there are already

demographic disparities as students enter high school. Still, they also come in tracked to their programs. All of the science teachers in the district that were interviewed discussed district mandates and that a student must have Algebra 1 before taking honors Biology. The only students recommended for honors Biology as a 9th grader are GT in the district middle schools or a transfer student. This places non-GT students at a disadvantage if they plan to major in a STEM program in college.

Recruitment, Identification, and Retention

At the high school level, identifying gifted and talented students is not occurring. At this level, recruitment and retention will be the focus for teachers, the school, and the district. When recruiting students for AP and honors-level classes, many parents of minority students are unaware of the requirements and opportunities available to their children (Mun et al., 2020; Russell, 2018). Most of the teachers felt that parents do not know the school policies and therefore do not know about the different opportunities available to their children. Training students who are gifted or who showed potential and their parents on how to navigate the school system in terms of gifted advocacy would also be beneficial (Russell, 2018). Teacher participant felt that school counselors could market AP and honors classes to minority parents when holding their Individual Graduation Plan meetings. Others discussed holding more than one AP event to answer questions for parents and students. Mun et al. (2020) encourage schools to improve their outreach to families by disseminating information through home visitations and to "minority-sponsored events in the community and to improve connection with minority churches and corporations (p. 132). During this study, teachers corroborated with the research as the majority felt that they could increase the number of minority students they had by involving parents and the community.

Retention of minority students enrolled in advanced placement and honors-level classes is just as important as recruiting new students. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) found that minority students are likelier to drop out of gifted programs than White students. Many strategies are recommended for use to keep students. It is important to provide academic and socio-emotional support, especially to the newly identified gifted students, as they might not ethnically identify with the students in their classes (Worrell & Dixson, 2018). This study aligned with the research as many teachers discussed the effect of cultural pressure on the retention of their minority students in their higher-level classes. Several teachers discussed the effect that peer pressure has on their African American students. This concern centered around the peer pressure to not be White. These teachers linked that pressure to the culture they are in and that their students do not want to be ostracized from their culture. Teachers felt that culture is a hard battle to fight with teens that want so much approval from their friends. Other teachers felt that a lot of minority students do not have friends in the higher-level programs, so they do not want to be there, which affects the retention of minority students in higher-level classes.

Using role models and mentors is another strategy beneficial to minority students in gifted programs. Worrell and Dixson (2018) encourage members of underrepresented communities to become role models and mentors and to engage and encourage minority students to be successful. This multiple case study found that students need positive examples of what they can accomplish for minority students; finding a mentor, whether a community member, teacher, or upperclassman, that has been successful and can show them the benefits of taking higher-level classes is invaluable.

Multicultural Education Curriculum

Minority students need to meet and experience a curriculum that "highlights, showcases, speaks from points of view, life experiences, and contributions" of other marginalized groups (Milner & Ford, 2007, p. 167). All participants agreed with the research. Participants felt that having a multicultural education curriculum would make their classes more inclusive and help motivate, engage, and inspire minority students. That said, most teachers shared that they only teach the state standards and do not include multiculturalism. Many teachers indicated that they do not include anything in their curriculum to celebrate Black History or Hispanic Heritage month. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) stress that including multiculturalism in the curriculum is an effective strategy to increase the retention of minority students in higher-level classes. Making gifted programs culturally relevant to underrepresented students can include enrichment activities that reflect their cultural heritage, which can also help them create their identity and belonging to the programs (Worrell & Dixson, 2018).

While instructing gifted students, teachers must comprehensively understand diverse cultural topics and events relevant to their student population. This can help them more easily include multicultural education in their classrooms (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Novak and Jones (2021) confirm that multicultural pedagogies and strategies help students relate course content to their cultural context and typically look like celebrating cultural diversity and not just social justice work. This study confirmed the research, and several participants expressed their concern that if teachers were not careful about how they presented cultural topics, their minority students could feel marginalized. If a teacher is not caring and passionate and tries to implement cultural topics, students may perceive it as something they are required to do.

Talent Development

The participants provided numerous examples of how to develop minority students' talent. Including mock lessons for students before they enroll in higher-level classes can enable teachers to evaluate which students could handle the more rigorous courses. Talent development can also be fostered through support. Many participants discussed having after-school programs to support students in higher-level classes, having summer courses for incoming AP students, and providing workshops for students that cover study skills and socioemotional health. These findings aligned with several research studies. For talent development to be successful, opportunities must first be provided for talent to the surface, talent must then be recognized, and educational opportunities must be provided (Siegle et al., 2016). Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018) and Worrell et al. (2019) noted that supplemental enrichment and acceleration programs are necessary to combat opportunity gaps and will help provide access to enriching academic summer and weekend programs and exposure to higher education.

Reaching out to potential AP and honors students before they enter high school was discussed by many teachers. Participants recommended creating a bridge program to aid minority students and prepare them for the rigor of the courses in high school. This also includes providing experiences for students that might not be the typical AP and honors-level students. This finding aligned with Plucker et al. (2017), who found that frontloading prepared students for advanced programs before they even had a chance to be identified. Underrepresented students need to be exposed to a more rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment, which will help ensure that they have the intellectual skills and academic habits that will allow them to thrive when they enter advanced classes (Plucker et al., 2017).

Teacher Training

There is a great deal of research focusing on teacher training in gifted education (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Novak and Jones, 2021; Mathijssn et al., 2021; Siegle et al., 2010; Worrell & Dixson, 2018). Novak and Jones (2021) noted that gifted education is not part of the undergraduate curriculum in most teaching programs. Participants corroborated this research, as many stated that they did not receive formal training in the teaching programs they had to complete for certification. Mathijssn et al. (2021) found that most states require a high-ability license or certificate or an add-on license beyond the regular instruction license (Mathijssn et al., 2021). This case study aligned with the research as South Carolina requires teachers of honors-level courses to have a Gifted and Talented Endorsement. This endorsement requires teachers to take two graduate-level courses on gifted and talented learners. Participants explained that the Campbell School District offers the two courses through the district, but they must pay for them. Ten of the 12 participants completed the courses through the district, while one took the courses through SC Virtual Education, and the other has not taken any courses. To teach an AP course, teachers must have an endorsement to teach the specific course, which is taught by College Board professionals and is strictly focused on curriculum. This is typically paid for by the district. Half of the participants have completed the training for an AP endorsement.

Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017), Mathijssn et al. (2021), and Siegle et al. (2010) all found that training in gifted education does occur; however, it typically occurs via-school led professional development. They also found that implementing professional development for teachers in identifying gifted students will allow teachers to understand better what to look for (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Mathijssn et al., 2021; and Siegle et al., 2010). The findings of this study diverged from previous research as participants reported that other than the endorsement courses, they have not received any additional training to identify or instruct gifted

students. Many teachers felt that other than their GT and AP endorsement courses, they do not remember any other trainings offered by the district. Several other teachers shared that the only additional training they received was for special education students. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017) and Worrell and Dixson (2018) found that topics related to advanced learning should be in the professional development rotation, just like any topic of need, and should include learning about more than gifted pedagogy for teachers and requires learning how to teach minority students. The findings diverged from this research as most participants did not discuss evaluating their minority students any differently for AP and honors-level courses.

Implications

The findings from this case study may have several implications for school districts, schools, teachers, and school leaders. The following sections address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications related to the teacher recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level classes.

Theoretical Implications

The study's conceptual framework consisted of the invitational theory (1978). The theory argues that learning is enhanced and achieved when students are encouraged and invited to participate in an educational setting (Haigh, 2011; Novak et al., 2014; Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Siegel, 2013). The theory has embraced beliefs and practices compatible with multicultural approaches and focuses on the equity of school programs and whether students have equal opportunities to participate in them at school (Moeller et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2007). A theoretical implication of this study is that teachers can utilize a multicultural approach in their classrooms to include and help motivate minority students to excel and enroll in more challenging courses. The study's findings show that

although teachers feel a multicultural curriculum can benefit their students, most are not currently utilizing it during their day-to-day teaching.

The theory also stresses that the education process should be collaborative and cooperative. Teachers, students, parents, school counselors, and administrators are all a part of the educational experience, and the theory strives for the total involvement of all stakeholders (Purkey & Novak, 2015; Schmidt, 2007). Another theoretical implication of this study is that more cooperation and collaboration must occur between stakeholders in the teacher recommendation process. The participants typically collaborate with their students to determine which courses they should be recommended for in the upcoming school year. However, most do not collaborate with parents, school counselors, other teachers, or administrators.

Schmidt (2007) and Moeller et al. (2012) stress that schools that embrace invitational theory will use enlistment to strive for the total involvement of all students. Schools should analyze their policies and programs to evaluate their level of enlistment and increase the number of diverse students involved in honors-level and advanced placement classes (Schmidt, 2007). The final theoretical implication of this study is utilizing enlistment and intentionally inviting students to higher-level classes. The findings suggest that utilizing enlistment and intentionally inviting students to Advanced Placement, and honors-level classes increases the number of minority students that enroll.

Empirical Implications

This study has noteworthy empirical implications for the teacher recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level classes. Little to no research has focused on the teacher recommendation process at the high school level. This study filled the gap in the literature on this phenomenon. It provided insight into the processes teachers take to recommend

students for classes and the identifiers they use to evaluate students. One implication of this study is that participants explained their processes during the teacher recommendation process. Most participants take a day and individually meet with their students and discuss with them what classes they would like to take, future college and career goals, and what they are interested in. Also, participants use more than test scores and grades to evaluate student abilities and readiness for advanced placement and honors-level classes. The level of effort a student puts forth is the first indicator teachers use, followed by grades, and then test scores.

Another empirical implication is how participants perceived how to increase the number of students enrolled in advanced placement and honors-level classes, especially concerning minority students. For example, creating opportunities for students to preview a more rigorous curriculum through mock lessons or bridge programs and providing mentors and additional support programs for students could be beneficial. The findings suggest that incorporating different support systems for the students could have a compounding effect on the number of students that enroll in higher-level courses, especially minority students.

One last empirical implication is that the participants shared that there was a lack of training provided in the identification of gifted students at the high school level. This was especially true with identifying giftedness in minority students. Teachers of advanced placement and honors-level classes must have the required endorsement to teach higher-level classes, but they primarily determine if students will remain at the same level for the upcoming school year, whereas college prep teachers decide if students will be able to move up to an AP or honors-level class. The college prep teachers are not required to have any extra training on identifying giftedness. Teachers are the gatekeepers to the advanced placement and honors-level classes and must be able to understand how to recognize gifted traits in all students.

Practical Implications

A practical implication is that school leaders should encourage collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders in the recommendation process. If a parent does not agree with the recommendation made by a teacher, communication between the parent and teacher should take place. Teachers communicate with the students about which classes they should take, but there can be a disconnect with what information is relayed to their parents. Currently, in this school district, there is time set aside in the morning for collaboration, preparation for the school day, and meetings. Typically, this time is used to meet with teachers that teach the same courses and are in the same department. During the recommendation period, I recommend that school leaders require more collaboration and communication between teachers of different departments and school counselors when deciding placement for students. Time also needs to be set aside for ninth-grade teachers and school counselors to meet and collaborate with eighth-grade teachers and school counselors, as placement for students in this transition year can determine the classes, they take for the next four years.

Another practical implication for school leaders is to offer professional development for all teachers that go beyond differentiation and the needs of special education students. This multiple case study found that outside of the teachers that have taken the two graduate level classes needed to earn their Gifted and Talented endorsement, teachers do not feel like they have been trained in identifying giftedness in students. This is especially true with teachers that have not taken the courses for the endorsement and have received no additional training. To effectively increase the number of students, specifically minority students, teachers need to be trained on what characteristics to look for and what curriculum and activities to use in their classroom that will allow students the opportunity to exhibit these characteristics.

One last practical implication for school leaders is providing additional support for students and parents to understand better the various levels of courses offered at the high school as well as providing additional support for students once enrolled in the higher-level classes. Participants in this multiple case study said they feel parents do not understand the different levels of courses offered at the high school. They did share that there is typically a rising ninth-grade and AP night offered, but that it needs to provide more opportunities for parents and students. This can also include providing information to parents on what the possibilities are, for example, higher grade point average or college credit, if students are enrolled in higher-level classes. I recommend having smaller events where parents and students can talk with teachers and former students of the programs. Providing support for students once they are enrolled in higher-level courses is also important. Participants suggested having former students or community members that have been successful mentor students. This will also encourage the retention of minority students as they can talk with people from similar cultural backgrounds. In addition, providing programs that can help students struggling with the curriculum, study skills, or socioemotional health would be beneficial.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of a study are purposeful restrictions of what the study does not include, while limitations are the weaknesses of the study design or method (Crawford, Burkholder, et al., 2020). Crawford, Burkholder, et al. (2020) noted that “delimitations narrow the study in terms of participants, time, and/or location,” while limitations are “declaring known weaknesses and describe what has been done to overcome them and/or what has prevented overcoming them” (pp. 323-324). In this study, the delimitations were the decisions made to

create restrictions and limits for this multiple case study. As the researcher, I was not able to control the limitations.

Delimitations

A delimitation of the study was recruiting teachers and school counselors certified in their fields at the high school level. This delimitation ensured that the participants had experience working in their field and were certified either through a college or alternate route program. This training and expertise were appropriate for the study to ensure that the included participants were knowledgeable in the recommendation process and certified in their fields at the high school level. Another delimitation was the number of participants included in the study. The intent of interviewing a certified teacher in the core subjects at the three different high schools was to create an in-depth study that focused on the phenomena at each site. Focusing on the experiences of the teachers and school counselors resulted in fewer participants. The study was designed to interview four teachers and survey one school counselor from each high school. All interviews and surveys were completed.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include the timing of data collection and sample size. Data was gathered at the end of the school year when many were packing up their classrooms and no longer checking email. In addition, the recommendation process occurs in November and December for classes in the next school year. Collecting data in June and July was six months after they experienced the recommendation process, and for many, they no longer had the necessary documentation. Although the required sample size was met, a larger sample size might have been possible if an incentive had been offered and data had been collected during the school year. Increasing the sample size would have led to more variety in the demographics of the

teachers interviewed. Most of the teachers that replied to the interest email were from the same ethnicity and taught the same level classes, primarily honors, and advanced placement courses. The experiences of teachers and school counselors might have varied based on their ethnicity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Little to no research has focused on the teacher recommendation process for advanced placement and honors-level classes at the high school. Therefore, this study filled the gap in the literature. Teacher recommendations for higher-level classes differ from teacher recommendations for gifted and talented identification in elementary and middle schools. From this study, it was found that teachers recommend students first by student effort and then by evaluating student grades and test scores. With effort being the main identifier utilized for recommending students for AP and honors-level classes, additional research needs to be conducted to further why there is still an underrepresentation of minority students in higher-level high school classes. A qualitative case study is recommended to gather additional research to determine if the main identifiers for recommendation into higher-level are consistent in other school districts in the Low Country of South Carolina.

Because this study occurred at the end of the school year, seven months after the recommendation for the following school year had been completed, teacher experiences could have been influenced by time. Future research should be conducted during the recommendation period utilizing a mixed methods study to collect data to evaluate which students are recommended for advanced placement and honors-level classes level classes based on grade, gender, and ethnicity. This data could lead to additional research to determine where there is an issue with enrolling students in higher-level courses and whether it is an issue that originates at school or home. A mixed methods study during the recommendation period could also lead to a

more culturally diverse group of participants which could add value to the findings. Another recommendation is to conduct a qualitative study to explore the experiences and process of the recommendation process in the transition of students from middle to high school. This transition places students into a specific track which leads to very minimal movement and, therefore, can influence a student's trajectory once they graduate.

This study included the experiences of teachers and school counselors in the teacher recommendation process. However, further research could include the experiences of students and parents in this process to determine the roadblocks for minority students to enroll in higher-level high school classes. This study could help identify the perceptions of parents and students and whether there is an appropriate amount of information that is being disseminated by the district so that they can understand the different levels of classes at the high school. This study could also provide information to understand what kind of support students in higher-level classes need to fight the retention of minorities in the courses.

Summary

There is an underrepresentation of minority students in advanced placement and honors classes at the high school level (Allen, 2017; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Ramos, 2010). The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the process and the experiences of teachers in recommending students for advanced placement and honors-level high school classes. The exploration of this phenomenon filled the gap in the research and could contribute to closing the gap in the underrepresentation of minority students in higher-level high school courses. In this study, teachers perceived the teacher recommendation process as an opportunity to meet with students and discuss what classes they would like to take, future college and career goals, and what they are interested in. Participants recommend using

more than test scores and grades to evaluate students' abilities and readiness for advanced placement and honors-level classes, but to additionally focus on their effort. The participants suggested creating opportunities for students to preview a more rigorous curriculum through mock lessons or bridge programs and providing mentors and additional support programs to increase the number of students enrolling in higher-level courses, especially to support minority students. Also, the participants perceived a lack of training to identify gifted characteristics in students at the high school.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 7, 2022

Lori Thomas
Floralba Arbelo Marrero

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-771 Underrepresentation of Minority Students in Higher-Level High School Classes in the Low Country of South Carolina: A Case Study

Dear Lori Thomas, Floralba Arbelo Marrero,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN HIGHER-LEVEL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES IN THE LOW COUNTRY OF SOUTH CAROLINA: A CASE STUDY
Principal Investigator: Lori Thomas, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a school counselor in the school district. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the process and experiences of educators in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level classes.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. A 15–30-minute online survey to be completed within one month.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include better understanding of how students are recommended for honors-level and Advanced Placement classes and how minority students are affected through this process.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Lori Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN HIGHER-LEVEL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES IN THE LOW COUNTRY OF SOUTH CAROLINA: A CASE STUDY

Principal Investigator: Lori Thomas, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an educator in the school district and hold a teaching certificate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the process and experiences of teachers in recommending minority students for advanced placement and honors-level classes.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in a 30–60-minute interview which will be recorded using the Zoom platform.
2. Provide documentation of any recommendation procedures to be completed within one month.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include better understanding of how students are recommended for honors-level and Advanced Placement classes and how minority students are affected through this process.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Lori Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to video record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been a school counselor?
2. What certifications do you have, and what degrees have you obtained?
3. What educational experiences have you had that help aid you identify giftedness in your students?
4. What identifiers do you use to recommend a student take advanced placement and honors-level classes?
5. Why do you think there is an underrepresentation of minority students in honors-level and advanced placement classes?
6. What type of communication or collaboration takes place in the recommendation process with other teachers, school counselors, parents, and students?
7. What do you think are the major inhibitors for minority students to participate in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes?
8. What strategies do you think the school can implement to increase the number of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.
2. How long have you been a teacher, and what class levels have you taught?
3. What certifications do you have, and what degrees have you obtained?
4. What has been your experience with gifted and talented services?
5. As a high school teacher, what is the process to become identified as a gifted and talented student?
6. What roles and responsibilities do you feel the teachers have in the identification process?
7. What biases do you think are in the identification of students for honors-level and advanced placement classes?
8. How are teachers at your high school selected to teach advanced placement and honors-level classes in your district?
9. What type of knowledge, training, or experience do you have to identify the students for honors and advanced placement classes?
10. What identifiers do you use to recommend a student for advanced placement and honors-level classes?
11. In your classes at all levels, what does the ethnic make-up of your classes look like?
12. Why do you think there is an underrepresentation of minority students in honors-level and advanced placement classes?
13. What procedures/identifiers do other departments in your high school use to recommend students for high-level classes?

14. What type of communication or collaboration takes place in the recommendation process with other departments, school counselors, parents, and students?
15. Describe the multicultural focus, which can include the history and culture of minority students you include in your curriculum?
16. How do you think multicultural education would affect minority students?
17. How do you think participating in higher-level classes would improve minority students' academic performance?
18. What do you think are the major inhibitors for minority students to participate in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes?
19. What strategies do you think the school can implement to increase the number of minority students in advanced placement and honors-level high school classes?

APPENDIX E: DEPARTMENT RECCOMENDATION RUBRICS

Fair Oaks High School: Social Studies

Coming from:													
8th grade CP	93 in SS, 85 in honors English	only in extreme circumstances and very high grades in Honors English	Nope										
8th grade GATE	85 in SS, 85 in Honors English	93 in SS, 85 in Honors English	Only in extreme circumstances. Atleast a 93 in Social studies and 93 in Honores English										
CP Geography			Only extremely motivated students. Must have a 93 or above in both SS and English.	95% or higher in CP Geography and must be in an honors English class with a grade of 85% or higher.	95% or higher in CP Geography and must be in an honors English class.			Only in extreme circumstances, must have unusually high grades in course and 85% in Honors Biology					
Honors Geography		93 in course; 85 in honors English	85 in both Honors Geo and Honors English	90% or higher in Honor Geography and 85% or higher in honors English.	90% or higher in Honor Geography must be enrolled in an Honors English		95% or higher in course and a strong background in English	93% or higher in course and Strong background in Biology					
AP Geography			85 in both AP geo and 85 in English	85% or higher in AP Geography	85% or higher in AP Geography		90% or higher in course and a very strong background in Honors English	85% or Higher in course and Strong background in Biology					
CP MWH						90% or higher in CP MWH	Only in extreme circumstances, please speak to AP USH teacher.	Only in extreme circumstances, must have unusually high grades in course and Strong background in Biology					
Honors MWH						80% or higher in MWH H	90% or higher in course and a strong background in Honors English	90% or higher in course and Strong background in Biology					
AP Euro						70% or Higher in AP Euro.	80% in course and a a strong background in Honors English	85% in course and Strong background in Biology					
AP World						70% or Higher in AP World	80% in course and a a strong background in Honors English	80% or higher and a strong average in Biology					
CP USH								Only in extreme circumstances, must have unusually high grades in course and 85% in Honors Biology	90% or higher in course, 85% or higher in Pre-Cal or Alg 2 at least.	85% or Higher in course and 85% or higher in English	95% or higher and be enrolled in an Honors or AP English class		
Honors USH								85 in course; Strong background in Biology	85% or higher in course, 85% or higher in Pre-Cal or Alg 2 at least.	85% or Higher in course and 85% or higher in English	85% or higher and be enrolled in an Honors or AP English		85% or higher with an 90% in an honors English Course. Must be enrolled or have taken an upper level math.
AP USH		85 in course; 85 in honors English						85 in course; Strong background in Biology	85% or higher in course, 85% or higher in Pre-Cal or Alg 2 at least.	80% or Higher in course and 85% or higher in English	80% or higher and be enrolled in an Honors or AP English class		80% or high with an 85% or higher in an Honors English course. Must be enrolled or have taken an upper level math.
AP Psych		85 in course; 85 in honors English					90% in course and 85% in honors English					must have a Biology grade of 85 or higher	
Electives							Please be very selective. 93% in course and 85% in honors English	Please be very selective. 93% in course and 85% in honors English					

APPENDIX F: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Ethnic Make-up of Schools

Fair Oaks High School

Grade Level	Total in Grade	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
9	708	7	201	31	7	20	2	440
10	616	7	167	15	4	18	3	402
11	518	8	139	17	4	18	1	331
12	489	10	118	13	2	18	1	327
Total	2331	32	625	76	17	74	7	1500
Percent	100%	1.4%	27%	3.3%	0.7%	3.2%	0.3%	64.4%

Gold River High School

Grade Level	Total in Grade	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
9	684	22	309	103	1	41	1	207
10	522	27	209	89	0	44	2	151
11	480	19	183	75	2	75	2	158
12	484	18	221	62	1	62	0	158
Total	2170	86	922	329	4	329	5	1500
Percent	100%	4%	42.4%	15.2%	0.2%	15.2%	2.4%	31.1%

Laurel Springs High School

Grade Level	Total in Grade	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
9	911	4	271	41	7	33	7	548
10	762	11	223	37	14	18	2	457
11	713	9	188	27	6	17	4	462
12	733	8	196	36	8	20	1	464
Total	3119	32	878	141	35	88	14	1931
Percent	100%	1%	28.2%	4.5%	1.1%	2.8%	0.4%	62%

Students Enrolled in Honors and AP Classes

Fair Oaks High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
AP	384	11	35	10	1	8	2	317
Percent	100%	2.9%	9.1%	2.6%	0.3%	2.1%	0.5%	90.4%
Honors	1245	25	213	39	6	37	5	920
Percent	100%	2%	17.1%	3.1%	0.5%	3%	0.4%	73.9%

Gold River High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
AP	291	34	68	20	4	2	1	162
Percent	100%	11.7%	23.4%	6.9%	1.4%	0.7%	0.3%	55.7%
Honors	1227	82	435	111	15	33	5	546
Percent	100%	6.7%	35.5%	9%	1.2%	2.7%	0.4%	44.5%

Laurel Springs High School

Course	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian	Two or More	Pacific Islander	White
AP	664	15	81	17	4	15	3	529
Percent	100%	2.3%	12.2%	2.6%	0.6%	2.3%	0.5%	79.7%
Honors	2242	26	472	105	24	54	13	1543
Percent	100%	1.2%	21.1%	4.7%	1.1%	2.4%	0.6%	69%

Appendix G: Parent Override Form

STUDENT'S FULL NAME: _____ **CURRENT GRADE**: 8 9 10 11 12

I have thoughtfully considered my child's course selections and current academic performance, and I would like to OVERRIDE the following TEACHER-RECOMMENDED course(s). ***I understand that by overriding a teacher-recommended course, I am agreeing that my child will remain in the replacement course(s) for the entire year regardless of his/her progress.*** I understand that I cannot override a pre-requisite course. I understand that I may be contacted to discuss this decision.

	Teacher-Recommended Class	Desired Replacement Course	Parent Signature (*required for EACH requested course change)
#1			*
#2			*
#3			*
#4			*
#5			*

PARENT NAME: _____ **DATE**: _____

PARENT SIGNATURE: _____ **PHONE NUMBER**: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

_____*FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY*_____

Administrative: **Approved/Disapproved**

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

Date Schedule changed: _____ **Counselor/Administrator**_____