TRANSFORMING THE TRACKS:
A CASE FOR INCLUSION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS IN ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY IN ACADEMIC PLACEMENT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

For many years, equity minded education reforms, instituted through the courts or grassroots efforts, have been introduced in schools to minimize the disparities among students of different socio-economic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Opposition and resistance are often high given persons, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students, fear that gains in educational equity results in a reduction of educational excellence and academic standards. Because public opinion affects democratic decision-making in school districts and educational stakeholders have ways of undermining reform efforts and economically impacting schools, policymakers, i.e., administrators, have to respond earnestly to the concerns of the opponents in order for equity reforms to be successfully implemented and sustained. When permissible, administrators create spaces and opportunities for educational stakeholders, such as parents and community leaders, to collaborate with district and school officials to discuss, debate, monitor, and evaluate reform efforts and ultimately receive buy-in. Students' voices are often "represented" by other adults, restricted, or excluded altogether, even though they are the ones most directly impacted by reform efforts.

In this mixed methods study, I make the case for the treatment and inclusion of high school students as educational stakeholders, particularly around detracking efforts implemented in the Champaign Community Unit School District 4 (Unit 4) to address enrollment disparities in upper level classes, such as honors and advanced placement, which exists between African American and White students. This study employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a guiding framework for establishing the contextual and historical analysis of the relation between race and academic placement. CRT is also used to interpret and discuss high school student data collected from a district-wide climate study survey administered in spring 2009, while Unit 4 was under a

court-monitored equity consent decree, and individual interviews conducted in spring 2013, post-consent decree. Data outcomes suggest when students are not engaged as educational stakeholders, their unexposed opposition to equity reform manifests through forms of resistance that undermine reform efforts, impact desired sustainable outcomes, and reproduces racial disparities in academic placement.

Dedicated to my Mother and "Other Mothers"

In Memory of

My father, Lionel Leo Berry, Sr.,

My Cousin-Auntie, Antrea LaTrice Allen Delbridge

My Maternal Grandparents, Ivory and Julia Wilson

My Paternal Grandparents, Houston, Sr. and Ruby Berry

My Undergraduate Advisor and Mentor, Dr. Joseph Meyinsee

Acknowledgements

It was the start of the fall 2004 semester, and I was officially a sophomore, mathematics major at The Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As I was entering T.T. Allain Hall I ran into my department head, thesis advisor, and mentor, Dr. Joseph A. Meyinsee. He said, "Ivory, what did you do this summer?" I replied quite gleefully, "I spent my summer break just chilling, catching up with my friends, and spending time with my family. It was a really great and much needed break." He seemed surprise. He grabbed my shoulder and said, "Make that your last summer at home doing nothing. You need to be in a summer research program." I had great respect and admiration for Dr. Meyinsee, and I didn't want to let him down. I immediately started wrecking my brain trying to figure out what I could possibly do for the next summer. Dr. Linda K. West, my biology teacher, came to mind. I asked her one-day after class, "Dr. West, I have to figure out something to do for the summer. Dr. Meyinsee said I couldn't go home. Do you know of anything?" She told me, "You'd be perfect for the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate program. Go see Dr. Alma Thornton and Julie Harris. Tell them I sent you." And I did just that. I was unfamiliar with the McNair program. They told me that the program was for first generation college students from underrepresented populations interested in pursuing a PhD. For some reason, all of that went over my head. I didn't have a clue what it meant to be first generation and I surely didn't know I was underrepresented! All I understood from that initial conversation was PhD. I was excited about the possibility of being called "Dr. Berry!"

It was my initial excitement to be called "Dr. Berry" and my participation in the McNair program that lead me to Ms. Ave Alvarado who was visiting Southern for the Big 10 graduate school fair. I remember stopping by one recruiter's table, and he pretty much dismissed me and

in so many words said he didn't think I was a good "fit" for his university. I read that as "too Black." Nonetheless, I was quite discouraged, so I decided to leave the fair. As I was heading out the door, Ave was walking in, and she said, "Baby, where are you going? Come see me at my table." And I did just that. She spoke so highly of the University of Illinois, its programs, particularly Educational Policy Studies (EPS), and the faculty, particularly Dr. James Anderson. She told, "they'd love you in EPS." Interestingly, I had never heard of EPS (heck, I was a math major!), the University of Illinois, and nor had I ever stepped foot in the state of Illinois. But, her love and deep sense of pride for the Orange and Blue was so captivating that I just had to add Illinois to my list of potential graduate schools. I applied to EPS. I got accepted into the Masters-PhD program. Packed whatever could fit into my car; printed directions to the campus from MapQuest; and traveled solo, moving 14 hours away from home (over 700 miles).

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2 Corinthians 9:15 NIV: Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE "OBJECTS" OF REFORM

Historically, whether intentionally or not, public K-12 school organization, policies, and practices have yielded disparities among students of different backgrounds and favored White, middle-class native English speakers. "Educational disparities and intergenerational economic inequality are highly correlated with skin color, ethnicity, linguistic and social class status" (Welner & Carter, 2013, p. 1). Disparities exist in educational opportunities, such as access to gifted education and college preparatory curricula, and achievement outcomes, such as standardized test scores, discipline rates, and graduation and college-going rates (Mickelson, 2003; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Welner & Carter, 2013). Over the years, educational stakeholders, such as civil rights leaders, community activists, organizations, educators, and parents, namely African American and Latino, have raised challenges and pursued grassroots and legal efforts to address educational disparities in schools. Such efforts have resulted in the development and implementation of equity minded educational reforms in schools to reduce and/or eliminate unwarranted educational disparities.

This study focuses on racial disparities in academic placement and the reform efforts implemented in one particular school district in recent years via an equity consent decree. Academic placement is the broad process in which students are systematically sorted into classes or curriculums of varying levels of challenge and support (Braddock, 1990; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985). In this study, I refer to the equity reform efforts implemented to address racial disparities in academic placement as detracking. Detracking is a general strategy used in hopes of achieving racial equity and excellence for all students through

1) making modifications within a placement system or structure[1], such as expanding the criteria or practices used for making placement decisions, to provide more opportunities for underrepresented students, specifically African American and Latino/a, to access upper-level classes; or 2) abolishing traditional curriculum tracking and ability grouping systems within a class, subject area, academic department, or school-wide, in favor of mixed academic talent and more racially balanced classrooms (Burris & Welner, 2005; Oakes, 1985).

Similar to other equity reform efforts, implementing detracking is no easy task. Supporters of detracking are often met with great resistance and opposition, in part, because a) the effectiveness of detracking is inconclusive; "the broad range of reforms falling under the heading of detracking creates a conundrum for judging its success; it is difficult to make an over-arching assessment of a reform that has been implemented in such a wide variety of ways" (Rubin, 2006, p. 7); b) administrators, teachers, students, and parents may hold strong (and unfair) normative beliefs about race, class and intelligence; c) persons fear that advances in racial equity comes at the expense of excellence and status and opportunity for privileged students (Burlingame, Coombs, Sergiovani, & Thurston, 1999; Noguera, 2001; Welner & Burris, 2006); and d) detracking methods that seek to transform traditional academic placement structures, such as subject area or whole school detracking, challenges white supremacy and the notion that educational policies are race neutral (Perry, 2002). Opponents of detracking, such as savvy, elite parents, veteran teachers, and students typically enrolled in advanced level curriculums (Rubin, 2006), are concerned that a reorganization of schools and classrooms or the implementation of new policies and practices to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in academic placement would result in a) "watered-down" curricula, b) relaxed criteria for academic placement, and c)

[1] I use "system" and "structure" interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

an overall reduction in the quality of education and the educational experience (Benbow & Stanley, 1996). Opponents may show resistance to and, inadvertently, undermine detracking efforts through demonstrations that economically impact schools, such as reduced monetary support of school programs and initiatives and white or bright flight, in which students relocate to other school districts or transfer to private or parochial schools. Additionally, opponents may show resistance by supporting like-minded candidates to elected school board positions. Because public opinion affects democratic decision-making in school districts and educational stakeholders have ways of undermining reform efforts and economically impacting schools, district and school policymakers (e.g., administrators) have to respond earnestly to the concerns of the opponents in order for equity efforts, such as detracking, to be successfully implemented and sustained. Thus, when permissible, district and school officials (often with pressure from the community and other educational stakeholders) create spaces and opportunities for parents and community members to collaborate with district and school administrators and teachers to discuss and debate current data trends in the schools and produce and monitor effective policies and practices that accept both the mandates for academic excellence and equity. This collaborative effort can be instituted through district and school-level officials establishing committees, boards, inquiry groups, and forums, providing a sense of power and agency as well as policy development that satisfies and values choice and in-put, and in return, buy-in.

Educators and critics have highlighted the limited inclusion of students' perspectives and voices in education policy and reform (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kennedy & Datnow, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1994; SooHoo, 1993). In "Putting students at the center of education reform," Benjamin Levin (2000) states, "Right at the bottom of the education status list, of course, are students. They are subject to direction from everyone above. Even though all

the participants in education will say that schools exist *for* students, students are still treated almost entirely as the objects of reform" (p. 155). The very people who are impacted by education structures, reforms, policies, and practices, e.g., students, are often "represented" or have restricted participation in policy discussions, for "each level in the hierarchy of education believes it knows best what those at lower levels need to do, and has little shyness about telling them or, just as often, forcing them" (Levin, 2000, p. 155). Moreover, research on equity efforts, like detracking, often draws on large databases to look at trends to legitimize education processes as "evidence-based" (Oakley, 2002), rather than engaging students as educational stakeholders; allowing them to express their attitudes toward school structures, policies, practices, and issues; and making sure their perspectives are included in the larger, public conversations and debates.

Studies conducted by scholars, such as Benjamin Levin (2000), Dana Mitra (2004), Alison Cook-Sather (2006), Robert Falkenstein (2007), Caroline Lodge (2005), Beth Rubin (2003), Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter (2004), Susan Yonezawa and Malika Jones (2006), and Sonia Nieto (1994), have highlighted student perspectives on school policies, practices, and reforms, demonstrated some of the ways in which students are engaged by school administrators and teachers in education reform efforts, and discussed some of the benefits of valuing students as educational stakeholders. Yet, the limited (non) engagement and "representation" of students by adults in the development, monitoring, and evaluation of education reform efforts, specifically racial equity reform, continues to persist.

In this study, I make the case for the treatment of students as educational stakeholders and their inclusion in shaping and evaluating equity efforts, in general, but more specifically around addressing racial disparities in academic placement. Detracking is the general "go-to" strategy for addressing racial equity issues in academic placement although, as previously stated,

the effectiveness of detracking is still inconclusive. Even though it is the typical go-to strategy, either ordered by the courts or advanced by persons invested in eliminating racial disparities in education, student perspectives on and reactions to detracking remain relatively unknown and under-researched even though students are the recipients of and have daily interactions with such reforms at their schools. In this study, I argue that not only are students impacted—positively or negatively—by detracking, but also are capable of undermining reform efforts through acts of resistance, which may impact reform outcomes. As expressed by Nieto (1994),

> This focus on students is not meant to suggest that their ideas should be the final and conclusive word in how schools need to change. Nobody has all the answers, and suggesting that students' views should be adopted wholesale is to accept a romantic view of students that is just as partial and condescending as excluding them completely from the discussion. I am instead suggesting that if we believe schools must provide an equal and quality education for all, students need to be included in the dialogue, and that their views, just as those of others, should be problematized and used to reflect critically on school reform (p. 398).

I anticipate that exploring students' attitudes toward academic placement, as derived from lived experiences and influences of adults and peers, will reveal their opposition, resistance, and/or support for detracking. Additionally, I expect findings will inform efforts to include students as educational stakeholders capable of self-representation in monitoring, evaluating, and shaping education policies and practices.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study is two-fold: 1) to explore the Champaign Community Unit School District #4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement; and 2) to analyze and reflect on their understandings of and solutions to the racial disparity that exists between African American and White high school students enrolled in upper-level classes, such as honors, accelerated, and advanced placement (AP). I anticipate students' attitudes will

reveal their opposition, resistance, and/or support for equity efforts to address racial disparities in academic placement in the high schools.

In this study, when I refer to academic placement in Champaign Community Unit School District #4 (hereafter Unit 4), I am also including a reference to detracking. Detracking practices, or "Best Practices" as they are known in the school district, are incorporated in the present academic placement structures in the high schools, in part, as a result of agreements established under an equity consent decree to address and eliminate unwarranted racial disparities that exist in placement.

Unit 4 is the setting for this study. I chose this particular school district given a) the history of Unit 4 administrators' efforts to address racial disparities in academic placement through a federally monitored equity consent decree from 2002-2009; b) the availability of survey data collected from high school students who had the opportunity to participate in two district-wide climate studies in 2000 and 2009, respectively, voicing their opinions about school related issues, polices, and practices, such as academic placement; c) the on-going efforts in Unit 4, which include community and university involvement, to address racial disparities in academic placement; d) post-consent decree efforts that have created spaces for students to share their perspectives on school issues; and e) my status as a graduate student in the local area and involvement as a member of the 2009 climate study research team, volunteer with the Operation Hope mentoring program for local high school students, and former teaching instructor with the University of Illinois Upward Bound College Preparatory Academy and the AP Scholars Summer Academy. Thus, Unit 4 is a great setting, and the high school students are great participants for helping to understand the central phenomenon under study.

Unit 4 is located in Champaign, Illinois, a Midwestern, and micro-urban college town. The school district is comprised of an early childhood center, eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools, serving more than 9,000 students. Racially, the student population across all Unit 4 schools is 41.2% White, 34.9% African American, 8.8% Latino/a, 9.7% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.3% Native American, and 5% Multi racial/Ethnic (Illinois School Report Card, 2012). Housing patterns in the local area trend towards African Americans, by and large, living in the area north of University Avenue, west of Wright Street in Champaign, bordered by Interstate 74 on the north, as a result of de facto neighborhood segregation, including real estate practices. Segregated residential neighborhoods have presented challenges to establishing and maintaining racially balanced public schools. Though never under the auspices of a federal desegregation mandate, Unit 4 administrators—with pressure from the African American community and their supporters—have been making formal school desegregation efforts since 1967, in pursuit of racially balancing schools and classrooms and addressing equal educational access, opportunities, and outcomes for students, specifically African Americans. Efforts pursued within the school district have consisted of closing and opening schools, busing across neighborhoods, adopting a Controlled Choice[2] school selection plan, and creating magnet and alternative schools. Most recently, and a central focus in this study, Unit 4 participated in a voluntary, court-monitored equity consent decree. The consent decree was a court-monitored agreement between the school district and African American

[2] The District promotes the merits of Controlled Choice on its website as follows: "eliminates the need to continually redraw boundaries due to changes in housing patterns; offers parents and students stability in their school assignment; promotes school improvement in all schools; reduces the need for involuntary busing; promotes diversity in all schools; and allows the district to optimize class size at each building" (http://www.unit4registration.org).

parents (representing their children) to enforce resolutions agreed to by both parties in previous years to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities—which were revealed in various reports, such as the 1996 Office of Civil Rights (OCR) proactive review and the 1998 Education Equity Audit (Peterkin & Lucey, 1998)—in the areas of academic placement in upper-level classes, school climate and discipline, and hiring practices.

Data collected in 2000 for a district-wide climate study suggest levels of support to address racial disparities within Unit 4 varied, most evidently—but not solely—by race (Aber & Climate Study Team, 2000). Results from the 2000 climate study indicated 46% of African American staff, compared to only 6% of White staff perceived talented/gifted and special education programs were not administered fairly in the school district; African American staff (53%) and parents (49%) felt their schools needed to change to better address racial disparities, compared to only 6% of White staff and 7% of White parents who felt similarly; and 61% of African American staff and 48% of African American parents—compared to 9% of White staff and 5% White parents—believed it was very important for Unit 4 schools to incorporate African American perspectives into the curricula and make strides towards proportional representation of African Americans in upper-level classes, among other areas and school roles. Given these results, unsurprisingly, there was some resistance, particularly from White staff and parents, toward addressing racial disparities in the schools. “In addition to perceiving little reason to change, many feared that efforts to reduce racial disparities would not only be unfair, but would also make things worse for all students” (Aber et al., 2000, p. 32). Specifically, many staff and parents feared efforts to reduce racial disparities in upper-level classes, for example, would result in lowered academic standards, impacting (high performing) students’ abilities to achieve excellence, and serve as a disservice to African American students who they perceived needed

services, like Special Education or remediation, but could not because of issues surrounding proportional racial representation.

Despite resistance from concerned staff and parents, as well as board members, who thought, as stated by Mark Aber, a psychology professor at the University of Illinois, "It was a mistake to…have the district take responsibility for what they saw as a larger societal issue" (Dempsey & Silverberg, 2012, para. 45), the consent decree was entered on January 29, 2002. Unit 4 administrators, however, at the request of the consent decree plaintiff class (African American parents representing their children) citing mistrust, inadvertently curbed some of the fears about the agreements contained within the consent decree through creating opportunities for various stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, parents, and community members, to become involved in monitoring the consent decree and shaping what generally happens in the school district. Such opportunities included, but were not limited to: the Planning and Implementation Committee, the Education Equity Excellence Committee, the AP-Honors Task Force, and the Great Schools Together initiative. Opportunities for direct student engagement (instead of outside representation) during the consent decree, however, were sparse though students are the ones who have to interact in the schools and classrooms on a daily basis, are directly impacted by the actions, or lack thereof, from persons of higher authority, and have the potential to, intentionally or not, undermine equity efforts through acts of resistance. This observation is consistent with literature that expresses the lack of student engagement, their perspectives and experiences with education equity reforms, policies, and practices (Cook-Sather, 2006; Levin, 2000; Nieto, 1994; Soohoo, 1993). Fortunately, the district-wide climate study conducted in 2000 (pre-consent decree), and the follow-up study in 2009 (prior to the termination of the consent decree), captured some of the students' attitudes toward racial

disparities in education and the efforts put forth by Unit 4 administrators to address them. This study seeks to bring forward some of the attitudes expressed during the 2009 climate study,[3] primarily those focusing on academic placement, and place them in conjunction with interview data collected in 2013 (post-consent decree) to document students' attitudes toward racial disparities in academic placement in the high schools[4]. Findings are utilized to illustrate the need to engage students as educational stakeholders in order to produce greater, and sustainable, success for ongoing equity efforts in Unit 4.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study:

1. What are Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement?
2. How do African American high school students' attitudes toward academic placement compare to their White counterparts?
    a. What effect does race have on Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement, above and beyond the effects of gender, socio-economic status (SES), academic grade performance, grade level, AP enrollment status, and school affiliation?
3. How do Unit 4 high school students explain the difference in accelerated, honors, and AP class enrollment that exists between African American and White students, and what measures, if any, do the students recommend should be taken to address the enrollment difference?

[3] The 2000 climate study did not include items specifically related to race and academic placement at the high school level.

[4] More opportunities (e.g., Social Action Committee and Social Justice Seminar) have been established post-consent decree, under a new district administration, for students to share their perspectives on and solutions for school issues (e.g., racism, homophobia, and sexism) and to engage in social justice projects.

Significance of Study

General Significance

This study is significant in that it draws attention to the ways in which students, when not properly engaged as educational stakeholders, can undermine equity efforts, such as detracking, and impact desired outcomes through opposition and acts of resistance. As previously stated, students are often excluded, "represented," or have restricted participation in education equity reform discussions; however, student voice literature suggests students may offer unique knowledge and perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, which may counter the views of the dominant majority (i.e. adults), criticize hegemonic power structures, and identify educational policies and practices that have discriminatory tendencies or present classroom level, academic and/or social challenges (Cook-Sather, 2006; Kushman, 1997; LeCompte, 1993; Levin, 2000; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2001; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997; Thorkildsen, 1994). "Through open conversations about injustices in schools, student voice can raise equity issues that tend to get swept under the rug by administrators and other adults in the school who would rather avoid controversy" (Mitra, 2004, p. 652).

Engaging student perspectives on equity efforts, policies, and practices may also address their normative beliefs about intelligence (Rubin, 2006); address their support or opposition and resistance to reform; lead to new understandings of educational disparities and equity efforts (Cook-Sather, 2006; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2001); and influence future policy (Riley & Docking, 2004). Furthermore, engaging students as educational stakeholders may provide students with a sense of agency, power, respect, belonging, buy-in, and competence (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Nieto, 1994), which have the potential to positively impact school climate and academic achievement (Fielding & Rudduck, 2002). Brianna Kennedy and Amanda Datnow (2010) also

note, “As the most powerful agents in creating and maintaining school culture, students inevitably play a key role in whether reforms succeed or fail” (p. 1249). Research suggests that student voice may contribute to improvements in policy, teaching, curriculum, teacher-student dynamics, changes in student assessment/evaluation and teacher training, and successes in education reform outcomes (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003, 2004; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

Local Significance

Locally, this study contributes to the on-going discussions around race and academic placement, but from student perspectives. The findings produced from this study are, in part, complementary to the 2009 district-wide climate study report, providing a more in depth depiction of students’ attitudes toward academic placement in Unit 4 high schools. This study is timely in that despite the termination of the consent decree and the gains towards establishing racial balance in upper-level classes (Great Schools Together, 2012), concerns and fears from teachers and parents—and even students—about racial equity in placement, racial “quotas,” and lowered academic standards continue to linger. These fears are especially heightened since Unit 4 high schools have not been meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) according to the No Child Left Behind Act performance standards (Illinois School Report Card, 2012).

Additionally, I was able to meet with several high school administrators from the school district and learn from them what specific challenges they are experiencing with addressing issues around academic placement, namely racial disparities. They indicated their interests and openness to learning more about academic placement, and the challenges ensued, from the vantage of their students. Thus, conversations around academic placement, in specific, and equity and excellence in education, in general, are still hot button issues in the school district. As

previously stated, this study advocates for the inclusion and active engagement of students as educational stakeholders, who are not only directly impacted by the practices and policies implemented within the schools but also have the potential to undermine equity reform efforts.

The former Deputy Superintendent of Unit 4 stated in the local newspaper, the News Gazette, after the release of the 2009 climate study report, "we will never dishonor how parents feel and how students feel…we realize there are areas we will continue to work on related to race relationships. We take very seriously the report that has been given to us" (Heckel, 2011, para. 25). Although Unit 4 has had some administrative changes post-consent decree, including the selection of a new superintendent, it is my hope that the current administration is as invested in honoring how students "feel" and has the appetite to continue the work of improving the school district.

This study, along with the findings from the 2009 climate study, provides an outlet for student expression and a space for Unit 4 administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to 1) read, observe, honor, and respond to students attitudes toward equity efforts around placement; 2) learn what they are experiencing in their schools and classrooms; 3) unpack some of their opposition and resistance to equity efforts, like detracking, and 4) discover what recommendations they have for addressing some of the on-going academic placement challenges in the high schools.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT), which has the capacity to address issues around racism, colorblindness or race neutrality, privilege, and merit (among others), provides a guiding framework for establishing the contextual and historical analysis of race and placement, in general, and Unit 4 in specific, and analyzing and discussing students' support, opposition, and

resistance to racial equity reform in academic placement. Developed formerly from the legal scholarship of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, CRT's founding stems from an earlier legal movement, critical legal studies (CLS), in which CLS scholars focused on uncovering the ideological underpinnings of American jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Critical race theorists argue that CLS failed to include racism and racial inequality and its role in the construction of the legal foundations of society's maintenance of racially based social and economic oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002; and Taylor, 2009). They felt the critical legal framework "restricted their ability to analyze racial injustice" (Crenshaw, 2002; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1988; and Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As such, furthering the criticisms of CLS, CRT evolved and expanded its umbrella of critiques to include "a perceived stalling of traditional civil rights litigation in the United States in arenas such as legislative districting, affirmative action, criminal sentencing, and campus speech codes" (Taylor, 2009, p. 2) and "re-defined racism as not the acts of individuals, but the larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group relationships, status, income, and educational attainment" (p. 4). This re-definition of racism offered by CRT challenges the liberal ideology and American paradigm, colorblindness. Given the history of the 2000 Champaign Unit 4 Climate Study (Aber et al., 2000), colorblind racial ideology and rhetoric was expected to once again emerge in the 2009 survey data and in the present study.

Since its inception in American law in the mid-1970s, CRT has been extended to areas such as ethnic studies and political science. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT in education in 1994. A few years later, in "Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education?" Ladson-Billings (1998) presented arguments expressing the usefulness of CRT in understanding race in education, research, and policy, and provided words

of caution about its use in the field and the potential of its creators to "lose control of the idea" (p. 21). Ladson-Billings (1998) cautioned:

> …I believe educational researchers need much more time to study and understand the legal literature in which it is situated. It is very tempting to appropriate CRT as a more powerful explanatory narrative for the persistent problems of race, racism, and social injustice. If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education. Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it. We will have to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions. We may be pilloried figuratively or, at least, vilified for these stands. (p. 22)

Proceeding with Ladson-Billings' words of caution, for more than a decade, CRT has been used by educational scholars to examine racial inequalities in schools.

CRT in education is not wedded to any particular doctrine (Lawrence, Matsuda, Delagdo, & Crenshaw, 1993). However, its scholarship is grounded in the following tenets (Lawrence, et al., 1993; Solorzano, 1997, 1998):

1. *The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination*. CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life (Bell, 1992). Although race and racism are central to a critical race analysis, CRT scholars acknowledge the intersection of racism with other layers of subordination such as sexism, ageism, classism, immigration status, and sexuality amidst others (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; Johnson, 1999; Montoya, 1994).

2. *The challenge to dominant ideology*. CRT challenges and expresses skepticism toward dominant claims educational institutions make toward race neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, and equal opportunity, arguing that these claims camouflage self-interest, power, white supremacy, and privilege of US society's dominant groups (Calmore, 1992; Crenshaw, 2011; Solorzano, 1997).

3. *The commitment to social justice*. CRT is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991).

4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge*. CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to

understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination (Lawrence, et al, 1993).

5. *The transdisciplinary perspective*. CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists the inclusion of both a contextual and historical analysis of race and racism (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

In addition to a set of tenets, CRT possesses a set of constructs, of which this study directly engages whiteness as property (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995), critique of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988, 2011), and naming one's own reality (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Whiteness as property. Cheryl Harris (1993) contends that whiteness, that which Whites and honorary Whites alone can possess, provides material and symbolic privilege and is in itself valuable and property—the ultimate property. The underrepresentation of African Americans in upper-level classes may be attributed to, in part, the blatant protection of the advantages and property functions of whiteness, defending differentiated access for Whites to high track, upper-level classes (Barlow & Dunbar, 2010). The connection between whiteness as property and the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes is further explored in Chapter 2.

Critique of liberalism. CRT scholars argue a strong critique of liberalism, particularly noting that colorblindness is used as a contemporary justification for ignoring and dismantling race-based policies designed to address historical social inequity, lack of opportunity, and oppression (Crenshaw, 2011). Given the history of racism in the US, from a CRT perspective, the concept of the "law as neutral" is considered "insufficient and disingenuous." Addressing racism from this perspective requires sweeping changes. Incremental change slows gains for marginalized groups and simply satisfies the powers that be (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In this study, CRT is utilized to demonstrate how the same idea of the "law as neutral" concept applies

to education policy, "education policy as neutral," and also to explore the ways in which supposedly "race-neutral," education policies, e.g., academic placement, perpetuate racial and/or ethnic subordination (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Naming one's own reality. CRT advocates the use of narrative and storytelling to give voice to oppressed groups and challenge accepted premises, presuppositions, and myths, especially those offered by the majority (Delgado, 1993, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Narratives, or stories, can challenge privileged discourses and notions of objectivity and, alternatively, promote multiple realities and amplify the voices of the marginalized. This study inserts students' voices, in the form of their attitudes toward academic placement into the larger narrative around race and academic placement as well as equity and excellence, from which they have traditionally been excluded (Levin, 2000). The attitudes of students, as explored in this study, at times provide counterstories to Unit 4 administrators' post-consent decree, "Mission Accomplished" rhetoric around addressing racial disparities in education, which is primarily driven by numerical racial balance figures. Students, primarily those who take mostly academic, or general curriculum, classes, also, at times, provide counterstories to the dominant discourse around why they may choose not to enroll in upper-level classes. Although in my study I value the perspectives of students in general, I am extra attentive to the African American students who may provide perspectives that differ from their White peers, and perhaps even serve as counterstories to dominant student narratives about race and placement.

Approaching this study through a CRT lens provides for opportunities to a) historicize, contextualize, recognize, critique, and analyze the influences of race, racism, white supremacy, colorblindness, meritocracy, power, and privilege in not only students' attitudes toward academic

placement, but the placement structure itself; and b) insert and amplify students' voices—which may serve as counterstories (Delgado, 1993, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)—around issues of racial disparities, through the telling of their attitudes toward academic placement and racial equity reform. With the tenets and constructs outlined above, CRT serves as a powerful theoretical framework for guiding and understanding this study.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 2, "Mapping the tracks: A literature review of African American representation in upper-level classes," I provide an overview of academic placement, a presentation of rationales for why African Americans are underrepresented in upper-level classes, and a discussion of detracking as a means to make the placement process more equitable. What is known about how students perceive and experience detracking implemented by schools to eliminate unwarranted disparities is also included in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, "Mixing and mastering: A mixed methods approach to elevating students' attitudes toward academic placement," the design and methodology employed in this study to answer the primary and subsidiary research questions are detailed. Following, in Chapter 4, "The consent decree was not the end, but the beginning:" A portrait of the Champaign Community Unit District No. 4," a historical illustration of racial equity and race relations in the local area, and more specifically in Unit 4, is presented in order to provide a descriptive historical and contemporary context for students' attitudes toward academic placement. In Chapter 5, "Blinded by the tracks: A presentation of the data outcomes," the survey results and individual interview findings are described. Chapter 6, "Rethinking the tracks: A discussion and conclusion," concludes this dissertation with a discussion of the overall data outcomes, policy recommendations, and future research considerations.

CHAPTER 2

MAPPING THE TRACKS: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION IN UPPER-LEVEL CLASSES

In this chapter, I provide an overview of academic placement and present rationales offered by powerful policymakers, teachers, and parents in defense of documented underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes. Additionally, I highlight structural and organizational obstacles that contribute to this underrepresentation and common efforts to address racial disparities in academic placement. Further, I acknowledge some of the complexities and challenges to implementing, garnering and sustaining support for, and evaluating such common equity efforts, like detracking. I conclude this chapter by emphasizing how students are typically not treated as educational stakeholders in equity education reforms to address issues like racial disparities in academic placement and why including their perspectives are significant to the overall success of equity efforts.

Racial disparities in academic placement

Introduction

Academic placement, or curriculum tracking, is the broad process by which students are sorted into different tracks (e.g. high/college, medium/general, and low/vocational) and/or groups (e.g., honors, advanced placement, and remedial) (Braddock, 1990; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985). Students are sorted based on their measured and/or perceived aptitudes for achievement and personal interests with learning environments that are thought to best accommodate their seeming academic ability and/or future aspirations (Braddock, 1989; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985; Tyson, 2013). Historically, African Americans are overrepresented in the lower levels of tracks and ability groups and underrepresented in the upper-levels (Oakes, 1985; Tyson, 2011, 2013; Wyner, Bridgeland, &

Dilulio, 2007). In comparison, upper-level tracks, ability groups, and classes, unlike lower levels, are typically accommodated with more credentialed, veteran teachers, additional resources such as supplemental textbooks, technology, and laboratory equipment, a more challenging and modern college preparatory curriculum, higher teacher expectations, and an overall better quality of education (Oakes, 1985). Given the importance of academic placement and its implications for future educational and career opportunities as well as state and national economic growth and development (Welner, 2001), it is essential to ask and explore the question, "why are African American students historically not equitably represented in the *upper-level tracks, ability groups, and classes* (hereafter "uppers")? Academic placement and the underrepresentation of African Americans in upper-level classes will be considered in greater detail.

Academic placement: who's not in the uppers?

Academic placement has implications for access to a college preparatory curriculum, college going rates, future jobs, careers, status, resources, advancement, achievement, cultural capital, and the list goes on (Gamoran & Weinsten, 1998; Green, 1981; Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985, 1987, 2005; Persell, 1977; Rist, 1970; Rossell, 2002; Torrez, 2004). The process of academic placement is grounded in the assumption that fairly homogeneous groups, as it relates to academic ability, allow for more effective teaching, tailored instruction, cognitive growth, and improved self-concept in which students progress at a similar pace (Ansalone, 2003; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Hallinan, 1994, 1996; Kershaw, 1992; Oakes, 1985, 1987, 1995; Persell, 1977; Wheelock, 1992). Academic placement practices originated in the Progressive Era of education (1890-1919), in which students were placed into curriculum tracks based on presumed differences in their occupational potential (Miller & Lynes, 2012; Welner, 2001). Today, almost all secondary schools in America have some form of academic placement (Gamoran, 1992;

Oakes, 1987; Venzant-Chambers, Huggins, & Scheurich, 2009). Some schools may practice more traditional forms of tracking, which separates students by presumed ability into a series of courses taught at various levels of challenge, while others may practice ability grouping, which separates students within or between classes for some, but not all, subjects (Braddock, 1990; Gamoran, 1992; Hallinan, 1994; Loveless, 1998; Oakes, 1985, 1987; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). Upper-level classes include labels like advanced placement, honors, gifted, International Baccalaureate (IB), etc., while lower level classes carry labels such as vocational, basic, or remedial (Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009).

In contemporary literature and everyday language, the divisions between tracking and ability grouping are often blurred, and, to a great extent, the two forms appear as a merged practice (Rossell, 2002). Although it is common for the merged practice to maintain both names, the ascriptions of ability grouping often dominate (Rossell, 2002).

During the 1970s and 1980s "tracking came under scrutiny and generated controversy due to research findings that implicated it in reproducing racial and class inequality" (Ballon, 2008) and promoting racial segregation (Esposito, 1971; Findley & Bryan, 1971; Rist, 1970; US Commission on Civil Rights, 1974). Studies, though contested, were finding that academic assignment had implications for access to a quality education, including curricula/instruction and resources, achievement, cognitive growth, and future opportunities and outcomes, among others (Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998; Oakes, 1985, 1987; Persell, 1977). Students assigned to the low-track, lower-level classes were receiving the least of each. This group of low-track, lower ability grouped students included significant overrepresentation of poor and minority populations, namely African Americans (and Latinos/as), who were also significantly underrepresented in the high-track, upper-level classes (Ansalone, 2003; Archbald,

Glutting, & Qian, 2009; Ballon, 2008; Burris & Welner, 2005; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Gamoran, 1992; Oakes, 1985, 1987, 1995; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; Wyner et al., 2007; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009).

To better understand what contributes to the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes, the following question is presented: "why are African American students historically underrepresented in the *uppers*?" I begin with this question in order to establish a record and draw attention to the inputs, or causes, that have resulted in such an outcome. Answers to this question, as generated from themes in the scholarly academic placement literature, include, but are not limited to, the following: "African Americans are not welcomed in the *uppers;"* "African Americans don't deserve to be in the *uppers;*" "African Americans, themselves, don't want to be in the *uppers;*" and "African Americans can't be in the *uppers.*" These four themes are explored further below.

"African Americans are not welcomed in the uppers." A brief exploration of the resistance to public school desegregation, as a racial remedy ordered by the US Supreme Court (hereafter Court) in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)* (hereafter *Brown*), is essential here to help develop the idea presented in this section that the underrepresentation of African Americans in upper-level classes is attributed, in part, to African Americans being unwelcomed there.

On May 17, 1954, the Court delivered a landmark ruling in *Brown*—representing the culmination of years of activity by civil rights leaders and organizations (Fraser, 2010)—dismantling the "separate but equal" doctrine, which had reigned supreme since the 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, with the rationale "segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children" that can generate "a feeling of

inferiority as to their status in the community" (Brown, 2005). The *Brown* decision also disrupted long held beliefs by many Whites about black inferiority. Whites perceived black inferiority as natural, and "all that segregation did was to corroborate nature's doing" (Kluger, 2004, p. 305). They believed "keeping blacks separate…would prevent contamination of white blood by the defective genes of colored people, whose unfortunate traits stemmed from their tribal origins in densest Africa and were incurably fixed upon the race from generation unto generation" (Kluger, 2004, p. 305). Blacks[5] were stereotypically characterized as low intelligence, dishonest, foul smelling, and outright evil and sinister people, and "white was all the things that black was not" (Kluger, 2004, p. 305). Therefore, segregation was a welcomed practice by Whites to insure "blacks did not rub off on them" and jeopardize their white purity. The Court, however, rejected this interpretation of black inferiority, arguing a lack of resources and equal educational opportunities in connection to racial segregation—not nature as whites believed in order to protect their own status, privilege, psychological and economic interests, and academic excellence—were the root of the badges of inferiority placed upon Blacks (Kluger, 2004). As such, the Court ordered school districts to desegregate "with all deliberate speed." The Court's order prompted massive resistance from Whites, especially Southern Whites.

White politicians rallied constituents, convincing them the Court's decision was fraudulent and thus they were not required to obey, while Southern congressional members protested the Court's "clear abuse of judicial power" and threatened to "use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation" (Telgen, 2005, p. 75).[6] Additionally, state legislatures crafted a

[5] "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably in this section of the chapter to reflect segregationist attitudes regardless of citizenship.
[6] This protest became formally known as the Southern Manifesto (Raffel, 2002).

series of laws in protest of *Brown*, which included, but were not limited to, "laws that required schools to close rather than integrate…laws permitting the sale of public schools to private groups…the authorization of the distribution of state tax dollars to fund private white schools…laws that criminalized desegregation efforts and a resolution "impeaching" the nine members of the U.S. Supreme Court… [and] laws clearly designed to punish or intimidate the NAACP's lawyers and membership" (Telgen, 2005, pp. 75-76). Citizens also exercised their voting privileges by approving constitutional amendments in support of segregation and resolutions of interposition. Through interposition, states could "'interpose" their governments between their citizens and what they saw as an unconstitutional action by the federal government" (Telgen, 2005, p. 76).

Efforts to resist desegregation were furthered by a 1955 decision of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Briggs v. Elliott* (*Briggs*), which ordered, "nothing in the Constitution or in the decision of the Supreme Court takes away from the people freedom to choose the schools they attend. The Constitution, in other words, does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination" (National Historic Landmark Nomination, 2001).[7]

Beyond the protest laws, the school districts that did adhere to the Court's decision developed "token" desegregation plans, such as free choice and pupil placement plans, that did not really intend to fully disrupt the segregated system (Brown, 2005; Clotfelter, 2004). Free choice plans gave individuals the freedom to choose his or her school. Since free choice plans did not require strict adherence to attendance zones, the effectiveness of the plans were subject to the "availability of open places in balanced schools" (US v. Jefferson County Board of Education, 1966). Thus, if white children transferred out of an imbalanced school (also known as

[7] This decision became known as the *Briggs* dictum.

"white flight"), then re-segregation was more likely to, and typically did, occur. Pupil placement plans, which as a result of the *Briggs dictum*, "gave authorities the ability to use 'local conditions' as criteria for denying black students places in white schools" (Telgen, 2005, p. 76), and provided a way to ensure "formerly state-segregated school systems…meet their constitutional obligations by removing legally imposed attendance assignments based on race under this plan" (NHLN, 2001). The pupil placement plan made Black families, who were interested in voicing opposition to a placement, pursue a timely administrative appeals process before they were permitted to file a lawsuit (Telgen, 2005). As such, districts were given more time to delay desegregation or reject it altogether.

Eventually, it took a concerted, and courageous effort from the three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial) to push back against the white resistance to the *Brown* decision. The Congress advanced school desegregation through the passage of two legislative actions: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Title VI, section 601, prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance, and ESEA authorized funds for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion. Furthering the action of Congress, in 1965 (revised in 1966), the US Commissioner of Education, Francis Keppel, representing the Executive branch of government, released General Statement of Policies Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Respecting Desegregation of Elementary and Secondary Schools, commonly known as *Guidelines*. The *Guidelines* were utilized as the marker of compliance for schools and other agencies receiving federal financial assistance as outlined in Title VI, section 601 (Lieberman, 1966). The

Guidelines officially connected public school desegregation with federal money. In order to receive federal financial assistance, districts had to comply with the *Guidelines*.

In addition to the acts of the Legislative and the Executive branches, the Judiciary contributed to the advancement of school desegregation through a series of rulings in legal cases such as *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County (1968) (Green), Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971) (Swan),* and *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado (1973) (Keyes)*. In *Green* (1968), the Court declared that "freedom of choice" is not acceptable where there are reasonably available other ways, such as zoning, to speedier and more effective ways to dismantle a dual school system. In *Swann* (1971), the Court ruled that the use of busing is reasonable to achieve compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1965) (*Brown II*) because the "assignment of children to the school nearest their home serving their grade would not produce an effective dismantling of the dual system" (1971). The Court's decision in *Keyes* (1973*)* forced school authorities to attest that the composition of other schools within the system is not also the result of intentional segregation. *Keyes* was the first time the Court heard a desegregation case in the north, ushering in a new sentiment from northerners towards school desegregation.

As the desegregation trajectory turned towards the north, facing new resistance and public outcry, the Court (now more conservative leaning) began scaling back its push and influence for continued aggressive action for school districts to properly implement and maintain desegregated schools. This lessening support is evidenced in such cases as *Milliken v. Bradley (1974) (Milliken), Board of Education v. Dowell (1991) (Dowell), Freeman v. Pitts (1992) (Pitts), Missouri v. Jenkins (1995) (Jenkins),* and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 (2007) (PICS)*. In *Milliken* (1974), the Court reversed and remanded

the decision made by the district court and Court of Appeals in the State of Michigan as petitioners urged for an inter-district desegregation plan. The Court held that the lower courts made an erroneous decision in providing an inter-district remedy in the face of a record that shows no constitutional violations that would call for equitable relief except within the city of Detroit. In *Dowell* (1991), the Court held that after a reasonable period of local authorities complying with a desegregation decree, the decree could be dissolved. The holding in Freeman v. Pitts permitted the withdrawal of judiciary supervision in school districts in compliance with desegregation decree plans. This decision allowed school districts to not only dissolve decrees for being in compliance after a reasonable period of time but also established that all the areas to reach unitary status outlined previously in *Green* (1968) did not have to be met. In *Jenkins* (1995), the Court held that increasing teacher salaries as part of a desegregation remedy to attract white teachers and students from the suburbs went beyond the authority of the Court. In *PICS* (2007), the Court decided that the use of the "integration" tiebreaker, which was one of three tiebreakers established to foster diversity for oversubscribed high schools under the open choice plan, was unconstitutional because it denied current and future students equal protection by using race as a plus-one-factor in pupil assignments to oversubscribed high schools.

Though the US branches of government had success in pushing back against the resistance from Whites to desegregate the public schools, those efforts did not necessarily engage Whites to reflect and radically critique how their normative beliefs held for Blacks, particularly around intelligence, motivation, and work ethic, are complicit in the reproduction of white racial domination and black inferiority within schools. Academic placement is one area in education policy where White ways of being, doing, and knowing are protected through normalization and used to determine curriculum placements of all students regardless of racial and cultural

background. Critical race theory considers this normalization the protection of whiteness, "a type of status in which white racial identity provided the bases for allocating societal benefits both private and public in character" (Harris, 1993, p. 1709). Harris (1993) argues that whiteness provides material and symbolic racial privilege and is itself valuable and a form of property—the ultimate property—that perpetuates inequality and protects deep-seated power. Parents may serve as advocates for the protection of whiteness, while teachers and counselors may serve as its protectors.

Savvy parents, although not exclusively White, middle-class and/or wealthy (but in most schools they are), advocate for their children to be placed in the best classes, acknowledging their understanding of school inequalities (Gamoran, 1992; Oakes, 1995). Jeannie Oakes (1995) suggests "fearing that minority student enrollment leads to lower educational standards, White and wealthy parents often lobby for their children's enrollment in more racially and socioeconomically homogeneous gifted and talented programs or honors classes within desegregated schools" (p. 67). Studies also suggest that teachers and counselors respond to the pressures and the fears of these savvy parents (Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Useem, 1991; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009; Wells & Serna, 1996). Teachers and counselors may consciously sort students with considerations of race and socioeconomic status, resulting in a "school within a school" effect (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004), in hopes that these parents, who are very supportive of school activities and programs, both physically and financially, will not enroll their children elsewhere (Oakes, 1995; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). These conscious decisions, advocated by parents, but made by teachers and counselors, provide additional insight into the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes and why they are not welcomed there.

"African Americans don't deserve to be in the uppers." In the vast literature, almost universally, the major criteria for placement consideration is the use of standardized test scores, both achievement and IQ (Ford et al., 2002; Hallinan, 1994, 1996; Jones, Vanfossen, & Ensminger, 1995; Kershaw, 1992; Oakes, 1985, 1987; Persell, 1977; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). Developed in the early 1900s, standardized tests function as "objective" instruments to measure students' aptitude in a particular area and often serve as prerequisite tests for advancement in the public education system (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989). In short, the underlying assumption is if a student can perform successfully on the standardized test administered, then the student will do well in the area which the test is intended to measure and vice versa. Thus, student performance on standardized tests reflects their individual talents and capabilities without any consideration of situating students within a particular context and whether the students had prior exposure or access to the content of the tests via the school curricula, home, etc.

With standardized tests being considered as objective measurements for determining future educational advancement, this presents an additional challenge to poor and minority populations. Unfortunately, "poor and minority students consistently score lower than do whites" (Oakes, 1985, p. 11); this has prompted suspicions of cultural bias and the questioning of test construction as a monocultural standard which often fails to capture language and experience differences of minority groups (Ford et al., 2002; Oakes, 1985; Williams, 1983). While traditional aptitude tests, more or less, effectively identify and assess White students, they have been less effective with African American students (Ford et al., 2002), thus underestimating African American students' capabilities (Oakes, 1995) and serving as insufficient measures of aptitude (Williams, 1983). Nonetheless, in many instances, these "hegemonic devices" (Au,

2009)—which often ignore students who have learning and/or cognitive styles that are different from Whites, do not perform well on dominant cultural loaded tests, and/or have test anxiety (Ford et al., 2002)—carry more weight than any other forms of placement information (Oakes, 1995). As such, since African Americans historically have underperformed on standardized, "high stakes" tests, they often do not meet cut-off score requirements, which in turn disqualify them for placement in upper-level classes. Regrettably, more than a century after they were initially developed and implemented, US public schools still rely heavily on the use of standardized tests for student advancement and placement, despite evidence of the cultural challenges presented to African Americans among other poor and minority groups. The message implicitly sent to African American students is that if they cannot overcome the challenges presented by standardized tests and perform successfully, then they do not deserve to be in the *"uppers"* since, ultimately, they will not be able to do well once they are placed there.

"African Americans, themselves, don't want to be in the uppers." Unsurprisingly, a number of African American students simply do not want to be in the *"uppers*." It is not that they do not want to have access to a more advanced, college preparatory curriculum and an overall better quality education with more opportunities for educational advances, but they may be willing to forego being in the *"uppers"* for the sake of sanity. Though, in part, this lack of interest to be in the *"uppers"* may stem from a) questioning one's own abilities to manage difficult classes (Oakes & Guiton, 1995); b) unawareness of colleges and universities' attentiveness to the rigor students took advantage of while in high school; c) determining one's current placement in a general curriculum track is appropriate and challenging; or d) awareness upper-level courses are not necessary for their post-high school graduate plans. There lack of interest may also arise from African American students feeling as if they do not belong

(Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). Some African American students perceive the culture of upper-level classes as "different," one in which they feel excluded given the overwhelming presence of White and Asian, and/or middle and upper socio-economic status students and teachers (Tatum, 1997; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). Thus, a number of African American students would rather take classes with their friends, who presumably "look" and "act" like them and share and understand their cultural symbolisms and nuances (Hallinan, 1996; Kilgore, 1991; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). African American students who perceive otherwise, or decide to engage with the culture of the "uppers," run the risk of being regarded and labeled by members of their own racial population as "acting white," (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tyson, Darity, & Castellinoi, 2005), a term used to describe African Americans who "use language or ways of speaking; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities considered to be white cultural norms" (Tyson & Darity, 2005, p. 583). "Acting white" has also been connected to academic performance and success, in which some African Americans infer that other African American students who enroll in upper-level classes are performing a characteristic of whiteness (Tyson & Darity, 2005). Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986) also suggest some African American students may possess an oppositional identity toward education due to being faced with persistent educational inequalities and discrimination and perceiving academic achievement as conforming to white standards. As such, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) posit, some African Americans may not value education because they do not anticipate the returns or benefits of an education to be similar to Whites. Studies conducted by Karolyn Tyson (2011), Karolyn Tyson and William Darity (2005), Margaret Spencer, William Cross, Vinay Harpalani, and Tyhesha Gross (2003), and others, provide counterarguments and findings to the study conducted by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), suggesting that peer pressure

towards black high achieving youth is not prevalent at all schools and that school structures instead of culture may better explain the racialization of stigmas associated with high achieving youth.

Nevertheless, it is no secret that, in most cases, African American presence in upper-level classes is indeed lacking, (Archbald et al., 2009; Blanchett, 2006; Ford et al., 2002; Gamoran, 1992; Oakes, 1987; Oakes and Guiton, 1995; Ohrt et al., 2009), and being one of few or even being the only presents its own challenges (i.e. feelings of racial isolation, the need to be the "spokesperson" for one's race-ethnicity, and academic performance). Therefore, for the sake of sanity, racial identity, and belonging, African American students may choose a peer presence in a middle track, general level classroom over a seat in a high-track, upper-level one. This decision contributes to the underrepresentation of African American students in the *"uppers*."

"African Americans can't be in the uppers." Track mobility and school organization and resources also contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students. Track mobility is identified as a contributing factor because once students have been placed on a track or in particular ability groups, little to no movement across tracks and groups typically occurs. As such, African American students, who have been traditionally tracked in lower or middle level groups since kindergarten or eighth grade, for example, are likely to maintain the same placement, or move downward (rare for track movement upward) (Gamoran, 1992; Hallinan, 1996; Kershaw, 1992; Persell, 1977; Venzant-Chambers et al., 2009). Thus, the restricted movement across tracks or ability groups may prohibit some African American students access into the "uppers."

Access to upper-level classes may also be prohibited because of school organization and resources. A limited teaching staff or oversubscribing may impact the availability of spaces for

students to enroll in the upper-level classes (Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Kilgore, 1991). On the other hand, some under-resourced schools are not able to offer upper-level classes at all, particularly advanced placement (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Thus, these issues around structural and organizational access contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes.

In this section I have highlighted some of the rationales powerful policymakers, teachers, and parents use to defend the documented underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes, such as African American students do not score high enough on the standardized tests that are taken into consideration when placement decisions are made, and African American students choose not to be in the upper level classes because they would rather take classes with their friends and/or do not want to be perceived by other African American students as "acting white." Additionally, I presented structural and organizational obstacles that contribute to this underrepresentation, such as track mobility and availability of spaces in upper-level classes due to limited teaching staff and oversubscribing.

Several measures have been considered and/or implemented to challenge and address the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes. The next section discusses legal and school approaches.

Addressing racial disparities in placement through the legal system

Racial disparities in academic placement have been challenged through the legal system. In *Hobson v. Hansen (1967)*, the district court found that the tracking practices and accompanying policies used in the Washington D.C. public schools denied lower socioeconomic status (SES) and African American students equal educational opportunities. Lower SES and African American students were overwhelming channeled into the lower tracks and received a

less rigorous curriculum and fewer resources and preparation for college and a range of future careers. The court ruled that the IQ tests, which were administered in early elementary school and used as the sole determining factor for track placement, were culturally biased given they were standardized on a white, middle class sample, and as a result, the tracking system in the schools was based on status instead of ability. The court further determined that the accompanying tracking policies trapped lower SES and African American students in their track assignment from early elementary through secondary grade levels. Later, in *Smuck v. Hobson* (1969), the court clarified the previous ruling in *Hobson* noting that ability grouping, as a process of academic placement, in itself was not unconstitutional in public schools just the manner in which it was practiced through the use of IQ test scores and subsequently, prohibited the academic growth and maneuvering of students into higher tracks.

Several cases around fairness in academic placement were also taken up in the 1970s. Rulings in cases like *McNeal v. Tate* (1975), *United States v. Gadsen County School District* (1978), and *Reed et al. v. Rhodes* (1979) determined that school districts should cease academic placement practices "until the effects of discrimination have worn off" and practices no longer "reflect the effect of past segregation or a contemporary segregation intent" (Rossell, 2002). These and other similar cases during this period reflected the general sentiment of the "temperature" surrounding racial disparities in education during the midst of school desegregation efforts. Courts did not want the advances and efforts made in school desegregation to be compromised by within school academic placement systems.

Although several court decisions in the 1970s favored opponents of rigid tracking systems, the legal justifications and criteria utilized in the rulings severely limited the ability to successfully challenge future cases around racial disparities in academic placement through the

legal system. “Several courts have used what has become known as the *McNeal* test to conclude that since the particular children now being tracked had never attended segregated schools, the earlier discrimination could not be blamed for the present disparate impact of tracking” (Welner, 2001, p. 41). Evidence of the use of the *McNeal* test to rule in favor of the defendants of tracking practices can be seen in *Georgia State Conference of Branches of NAACP v. Georgia* (1985) and *Montgomery v. Starkville* (1987).

Since *Georgia* and *Montgomery*, challenges to tracking practices on the bases of racial imbalance have been a hard fight to win. Courts have since upheld that racial imbalance that results from placement practices is not due to intentional racial discrimination but from student choice during open class enrollment (*Quarles v. Oxford*, 1989) and differences in achievement between races (*Diaz v. San Jose Unified School District*, 1993; *Vaughns et al. v. Prince George’s County et al.*, 1998; *People Who Care v. Rockford*, 1999/2000; and *Hoots et al. v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania et al.*, 2000). Thus, moving forward in addressing racial disparities in academic placement through the legal system, tracking opponents must prove that racial disparities in academic placement are the result of intentional racial discrimination. Proving intent can be rather difficult given the unitary, rather than dual system, status of school districts and the expansive criteria utilized to make placement decisions. Nonetheless, there is still legal hope for addressing racial disparities in academic placement. “A final avenue that does not require proof of intent is for the U.S. Office for Civil Rights to seek termination of federal funds under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Yettick, 2012, para 7). This is an option that many school districts now pursue, including the school district of interest in this study, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Addressing racial disparities in placement through the schools

School districts and individual schools have also taken the initiative to address racial disparities in academic placement. Broadening academic placement selection criteria selection to include teacher and counselor recommendations and/or parental and student choice, and implementing detracking are some common approaches that have been used within schools to increase African American student enrollment in the *"uppers*."

Teacher and counselor recommendations. Some school districts utilize teacher and counselor recommendations as selection criteria for the placement of students into various academic tracks, ability groups, or classes, in general. With teachers and counselors often being the closest to the students, their interactions and academic records, teachers and counselors are viewed as most capable of matching students' abilities and interests with appropriate learning opportunities (Kilgore, 1991). Although often noted as most capable of identifying student talent, the factors that serve as the basis upon which teachers and counselors make their judgments and recommendations are "no more accurate or fair than test scores" (Oakes, 1985, p. 12). Factors, outside of traditional academic records such as test scores and class performance grades, that may influence recommendations, include, but are not limited to, student's maturity and emotional stability (Rosenbaum et al., 1996), behavioral elements (Ford et al., 2002; Kershaw, 1992; Persell, 1977), student motivation and effort (Hallinan, 1996), and perceived academic ability and futures (Blanchett, 2006; Bowles & Levin, 1968; Ford et al., 1992; Kershaw, 1992; Oakes, 1985). These non-academic indicators may be associated with teachers and counselors expressing stereotypical expectations and deficient views of African American students, especially those underprepared and undertrained to work with African American students, in particular, and students of color, in general (Ford et al., 2002). According to Oakes (1985),

"schools far more often judge African American...students to have learning deficits and limited potential" (p. 60). Counter-stories (Delgado, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002) to this perceived learning deficit and limited academic potential assessment suggest misunderstandings and/or misinterpretations of the cultural styles of African American students (Boykin, 1994; Ford et al., 2002). "For example, verve and movement may be (mis)interpreted as hyperactivity; an affective orientation may be (mis)interpreted as immaturity, irrationality, and low cognitive ability; and communalism may be (mis)interpreted as social dependency" (Ford et al., 2002). Misinterpretations of the cultural styles of African American children may yield negative perceptions and affect the extent to which teachers believe these students are capable of learning and thriving in upper-level classes.

Choice. In addition to teacher and counselor recommendations, it has become increasingly common in contemporary schools for students and parents, to some degree, to have control over or input in class selections (Hallinan, 1996; Kilgore, 1991; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). Although powered with choice, the choices students and parents express are not necessarily made free of influence (Rosenbaum, 1996; Yonezawa et al., 2002). Teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and peers are capable of influencing the choices students make about class selections (Hallinan, 1996; Jones et al., 1995; Kilgore, 1991; Oakes, 1985; Yonezawa et al., 2002). Gamoran (1992) suggests, "parents and students almost always 'choose' what school officials tell them to select" (p. 9). Kilgore (1991) and Torrez (2004) add that given parents', specifically minority and poor parents', and students' lack of knowledge of the system regarding the consequences of their choice of program, they tend to rely on the decisions made by teachers and counselors[8]. As such, parent and student choice may serve as a rubber stamp of

[8] It is important to note that not all parents lack knowledge about the system of academic placement.

approval of teacher and guidance counselor recommendations, which as previously discussed lends itself to the underrepresentation of African American students in upper-level classes. Although this perception of "adult" choice masked as "student" choice may be widely shared and accepted, in this study, I demonstrate how students may also reclaim their power of "choice" and use it as an act of resistance to intentionally, or not, undermine equity reform efforts.

Detracking. Detracking is another approach used to provide African American students greater access to the "uppers" or a more rigorous curriculum. In 1985, Jeannie Oakes' *Keeping Track* was published, exposing the racial and class inequalities produced through tracking and giving rise to a collective of anti-tracking practices known as detracking. Detracking practices vary from whole school or subject area elimination of tracks and ability groups to more modified methods, such as eliminating lower/non-college tracks yet maintaining an honors/AP track, detracking non-gifted classes, selecting "high potential/low achieving" minority students to participate in upper-level, college preparatory classes and providing them with additional support, and permitting self-enrollment into honors and advanced placement classes (Welner &Burris, 2006; Rubin, 2006, 2003; Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Further, whole school detracking, in particular, may entail challenging normative beliefs about intelligence and ability as well as shifting curriculum, teaching pedagogies, and assessment strategies to accommodate and extend equal educational opportunities to a more diverse group of learners (Ansalone, 2003; Burris & Garrity, 2008; Welner & Burris, 2006; Loveless, 2009; Oakes, 1985; Rubin, 2003; Slavin, 1993; Wheelock, 1992).

Two general strategies for implementing either form of detracking are "win them over" and "take them on" (Welner & Burris, 2006). The "win them over" strategy, as characterized by Kevin Welner and Carol Burris (2006) is a bottom up approach in which detracking is initiated

by a core group of supporters. Under the leadership of a school or district administrator and buy-in from a substantial number of parents and/or faculty, these persons are able to set ambitious goals and carefully and thoughtfully implement detracking practices over a more flexible period of time. On the other hand, when evidence suggests schools are practicing racial discrimination tactics, resistance from opponents of detracking is too powerful, and/or there is not a substantial initial buy-in from parents and/or faculty to correct the inequities in the academic placement system, a "top down" (Welner, 2001), "take them on" (Welner & Burris, 2006), strategy may be more appropriate. The "take them on" strategy, as described by Welner and Burris (2006), initiates detracking through the support of court mandates and monitoring to address racial inequalities produced through tracking practices.

Regardless of implementation strategy, however, garnering and sustaining support for detracking may present a challenge to the efforts. Evidence of the effectiveness of detracking is inconclusive and the support for homogeneous ability grouping is quite high (Loveless, 2009; Argys, Rees, & Brewer, 1996; Slavin, 1995; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006). Additionally, support for detracking suffers because of the normative beliefs about intelligence held by administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and efforts to maintain the status quo for fears of jeopardizing excellence for the higher achieving students (Rubin, 2006). Moreover, these persons fear that slower learners will not be able to "keep up" in faster pace, more challenging classes, and thus, hold back more advanced learners from achieving their desired standards of excellence (Rubin, 2006; Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Opponents of detracking also fear that the prestige or status of being in an upper-level class would diminish, the potential for "bright flight" or "white flight" would increase, and cultural diversity in the classroom will expose more "well off" students to undesirable, deviant behaviors and lower the academic standards and rigor (Oakes & Lipton,

1999; Rubin, 2006; Welner & Burris, 2006; Wells & Serna, 1996). Therefore, as a result of the inconclusive studies, the fears associated with the practices, and the threats of resistance through economic and political demonstrations, few schools have been successful in initiating or sustaining detracking—once the courts are no longer involved—to address the initial problems around racial equity and excellence (Welner & Burris, 2006).

To curb some of the fears and gain and sustain support for detracking, Welner and Burris (2006), among other detracking scholars, suggest recording and reporting achievement data throughout the implementation process, providing indicators to the teachers, parents, students, and community about how the students are responding, academically, to the practices; responding to parents' concerns about co-achieving equity and academic excellence and its impact on all learners; eliminating the lowest track first, while simultaneously building in opportunities and choice for general curriculum students to access the upper-level classes, like advanced placement and honors; and offering mentoring opportunities and academic support for struggling learners. Beth Rubin (2006) as well as Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton (1999) also add the need to engage with teachers' and students' normative beliefs, or racist attitudes, around notions of ability, intelligence, and achievement. Teachers' normative beliefs can influence their expectations for students, pedagogical techniques, etc., while students' normative beliefs about themselves can influence their decisions to choose upper-level classes and/or question other students' belongingness in advanced classes and its impact on their strides for excellence (Rubin, 2006; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997); thus, this type of engagement is essential in implementing, gaining, and sustaining detracking efforts.

Though teacher "inquiry groups" (Watanabe, 2006)—and at times groups or forums for parents and community members—are typically organized to address their concerns, fears, and

normative beliefs, and perhaps even to monitor equity efforts, like detracking, rarely are students' directly engaged and included in education equity reforms (Cook-Sather, 2006; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Kozol, 1991). "Student voice" scholars, such as Dana Mitra, Benjamin Levin, Alison Cook-Sather, and Jean Rudduck, have highlighted this exclusion of students in education policy and reform, in general, and have offered recommendations for student inclusion as well as conducted research on schools that have been successful in creating opportunities for student advisory and engagement. As suggested by Jones & Yonezawa (2002), "student voice can be a powerful tool to shaping educational reform and policies if used appropriately" (p. 21) and garnering and sustaining support (Nieto, 1994). Students' perspectives often capture the realities of classroom and school life in vivid detail and reveal flaws in the current educational system, especially as it relates to issues of fairness and inequitable practices, in which adults are not always able to observe as outsiders or from the head of the class (Rubin & Silva, 2003; Jones & Yonezawa, 2002; Levin, 2000; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997; Kushman, 1997). Therefore, students are in a unique position to express how education reforms, policies and practices, like detracking, positively or negatively impact their lives as direct participants and recipients of the day-to-day interactions with the implementation and continued efforts to sustain such policies, strategies, and practices. When students are not properly engaged, the ways in which they are capable of undermining reform efforts and impacting success outcomes through acts of resistance may not be recognized.

Student perspectives and experiences cannot be fully captured, however, through the typical means of assessing the success of equity efforts, like detracking, which include but are not limited to, reporting of academic achievement data, such as standardized test scores, and/or presentation of enrollment figures disaggregated by race, socio-economic status, or some other

indicator. Consequently, a detracking practice, for example, may be deemed successful because data may indicate the achievement of students has increased and/or upper-level classes are within racial balance. However, this approach may fail to acknowledge students' classroom level successes and/or challenges interacting academically and socially with a mixed group of learners, reaching levels of personal excellence, and grappling with issues of racial equity and excellence in education, among other issues of school and classroom climate. Thus, it is important that students are treated as educational stakeholders and included in in developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating equity efforts.

Engaging student perspectives and experiences of equity efforts, like detracking, can be a blessing or a curse for reformers, policymakers, and activists. Students' positive perceptions and experiences can be used to help push forward the effort, while on the other hand, students' negative perceptions and experiences can give resisters and opponents additional power and fire to derail such efforts. Nonetheless, the inclusion of students' voices, as captured through their attitudes, which encompasses their perspectives and experiences, is needed in the shaping, implementation, and evaluation of equity efforts, as they too have a stake in education equity reform and are capable of undermining reform efforts.

Since students' voices are often not included, or "represented" by adults, on education equity efforts, and therefore, little is known or documented about their attitudes toward racial disparities in academic placement and the ways in which they may resist, oppose, or support the measures implemented to address it—the focus of this study. A few studies have captured student perceptions of tracking and detracking (Falkenstein, 2007; Jones & Yonezawa, 2002; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006). In Robert Falkenstein (2007) study on twelfth graders experiences of participation in tracked classes throughout high school, he found that students overwhelming

supported tracking curriculum structures. In Makeba Jones and Susan Yonezawa (2002) study on the use of student inquiry groups as spaces for high school students to discuss and critique school structures and cultures, they found that students believed "some pupils deserved more academic rigor and attention, based on behavior in class and readiness to learn" (p. 252). Additionally, they found that the more time they spent with the student inquiry groups and had opportunities to push students in their thinking about academic placement structures, students began to understand the correlation between race, social class, and placements in curriculum tracks (Jones & Yonezawa, 2002).

I discuss a study conducted by Yonezawa and Jones (2006) at greater length below in order to provide a better working foundation for what is known about high school students' attitudes toward the processes, structures, and implications for tracking and detracking. I chose to feature this study, in particular, because it focuses on "how students make sense of tracking practices and equity-minded policies to reduce tracking at their schools" (Yonezawa and Jones, 2006, p. 15). Other studies on academic placement generally do not include students' attitudes toward the use of detracking as a means to "level the playing field among students of different socio-economic, racial, and linguistic groups" (Yonezawa and Jones, 2006, p. 15).

Susan Yonezawa and Makea Jones (2006) conducted a study from 1999-2002, capturing students' perspectives on tracking and detracking with specific attention toward how students understand track structures within their schools and their thoughts on how to improve their schools structurally and culturally. They collected student focus group data from 12 high schools across three large, urban school districts implementing detracking. Over 500 students participated in the study, of which 48% were male and 52% female. Of the participating students, 36% were African American, 29% Latino, 24% White, 11% Asian, and 1% American

Indian/Alaska Native. Nine of the participating schools served a majority of low-income students, while the remaining three schools served 17% to 32% low-income students. Results indicated that most students felt there was something inherently inequitable about the tracking system. They felt that placement and tracking practices seemed unfair and that placement appeared arbitrary, speculating that placement was based on the master school schedule, teacher recommendations, prior middle school placements, grades, standardized test scores, and luck of the draw. Furthermore, unfairness was a common theme reported among the students as they argued that test scores were not a reflection of their motivation nor ability and that "speed should not be a proxy for intelligence," focusing sharp criticism on the use of standardized tests. Additionally, they reported unfairness in placement practices offering concerns of misplacement as the result of families moving frequently and being shuttled into classes with little thought as well as policies that governed tracking, which do not allow students to take one class without taking the other. Students also felt that as a result of tracking, students in lower tracks and or ability groups received "less rigorous and engaging teachers and curriculum," in addition to lower teacher expectations.

Even though the majority of students saw unfairness in the academic placement system, a few students, all enrolled in advanced placement and honors classes, "believed tracking was necessary to preserve a sense of meritocracy and believed their inherent intelligence and motivation warranted greater access to good teachers and rigorous curriculum." These students not only highlighted the difficulty to learn in mixed ability classrooms but also discussed their frustration with students who "didn't care," were disruptive, slowed the curricular pace, and required more of the teacher's time.

Students also offered their perspectives on detracking, which all of the schools in the study were implementing. Their perspectives on detracking reflected concerns with their respective schools to successfully implement detracking. They expressed sharp criticism of their teachers, insisting they were ill prepared to teach learners in mixed ability groups. They furthered their criticisms by suggesting teachers showed favoritism toward the higher achieving students and demonstrated higher expectations for them as well. Overall, the study concluded, "the students embraced a tremendous sense of equity" as "they were able to critique the system because many knew peers whom they felt the system didn't adequately serve."

Albeit the study did not directly engage issues around the influence of race in academic placement, students' academic and social experiences with placement, nor the ways in which students resist detracking, the perspectives offered by the students do offer insights into some of the challenges students face at the school and classroom level as well as how students perceive tracking and detracking and are thinking about issues of equity and excellence in education in general.

Equity & Excellence

This study also speaks to the concept, "equity and excellence in education," by highlighting some of the complexities of actualizing the concept into practice. For many years, the concepts of equity and excellence in education have been debated in scholarly texts, political arenas, school board meetings, and even kitchen tables. Though the discussions may look quite different in each of those spaces, the debate often pits equity against excellence (and vice versa), assuming that the pursuit of one compromises the other. However, this assumption has been challenged with arguments insisting that the two concepts are complementary. I posit that the ways in which students debate, conceptualize, resist, oppose, support, and actualize equity and

excellence influence their attitudes, experiences, and policy recommendations for addressing racial disparities in academic placement.

Equity vs. Excellence in Federal Policy

The history of proposed and/or implemented US federal education policies depict a back and forth shift in policies that appeal for either greater equity or excellence. In 1893, the Report of the Committee of Ten advocated for a uniform high school curriculum and that all graduates were to be accepted into college (Hall, 1904 as cited in Fraser, 2010). In the early 1920s and 1930s there was a push for the use of mental testing and measurement of intelligence to aid in societal stratification (Zimmerman, 1998). After World War II exposed the deficiencies of the American education system, elementary and secondary education underwent a transformation in the 1940s, becoming more standardized, better organized, and properly funded. During the 1950s, the Sputnik era spurred a focus on developing and enhancing the mathematical and scientific capabilities of talented students. A return to greater equity in the 1960s was ushered in with civil rights legislations and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as the creation of Head Start. The 1970s launched a "back to basics" movement, responding to reports indicating that the US students' academic achievement was lagging behind other developed nations. The National Commission on Excellence in Education report in 1983 attempted to bring the focus on equity and excellence together, pointing out that they were not incompatible and that both were achievable. During the 1990s, there was a push for multiculturalism and inclusion, yet at the same time a drift towards private schooling. In 2002, the ESEA was reauthorized into the No Child Left Behind Act, focusing on closing the achievement gap between White and minority students. Most recently, in 2011, US federal policy shifted back towards a greater focus on excellence as President Barack Obama, during his

State of the Union address, announced that the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act would take on features of Race to the Top Fund[9] and called for a post Sputnik 2 moment to spark innovation.

Resistance to equity

As previously stated in Chapter 1, education equity pursuits are often met with great resistance and opposition. In part, equity efforts are often surrounded by a cloud of fear stemming from concerns that pursuing education equity overshadows the pursuit for greater excellence (Burlingame et al., 1999; Noguera, 2001). Thus, fear and resistance function to undermine equity. Further, there is an overwhelming concern that attention to equity in education calls for a reorganization of schools and classrooms at the expense of high achieving excellent students, and at the benefit of the underserved and underprivileged (Benbow & Stanley, 1996; Rubin, 2006). The alleged loss comes in the form of less status and opportunity for privileged students; challenging curriculum to accommodate classrooms of mixed ability learners; relaxed or abolished criteria for academic placement; and an overall reduction in the quality of education and the educational experience (Benbow & Stanley, 1996; Rubin, 2006). These fears may often lead parents to remove their children from public schools and place them in private or charter schools or place extra pressure on their school district leaders to reconsider equity initiatives (Kohn, 1998). The problem lies in the underlying assumption that because equity is placed at the forefront, somehow excellence is jeopardized. Although there may be some merit to the assumption presented, a focus on equity or excellence does not necessarily mean that there is no focus or impact on the other. The challenge that lies ahead, however, is the ability to re-image

[9] Race to the Top Fund is "a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes...and implementing ambitious plans for education reform" (Race to the Top Fund Executive Summary, 2009, p.2).

and re-conceptualize equity and excellence, positioning them as two complementary, coexisting, and/or equally privileged concepts, which serve the greater good of all students. A similar challenge was made more than 25 years ago by John Gardner (1984), when he raised the question "can we be equal and excellent too?"

"That which is excellent is equitable"

Before considering the complementarity, coexistence, and/or relative privilege of equity and excellence, a working definition of both concepts must be established. For the purposes of this study, equity refers to the conditions under which limited resources, opportunities, and services are distributed in a manner that is fair and just among individuals of different backgrounds, regardless of status, wealth, and privilege (Smith & Traver, 1983; Willie, Edwards, and Alves, 2002; and Zimmerman, 1998). Rawls (1971) presents in his principles of justice that the weakest members of society may require more than the most privileged and thus resources may be unequally distributed in order to provide appropriate and sufficient treatment to meet their needs. Contrary to equity, excellence is more difficult to define, as it can be viewed as an individualistic or group/institutional quality or goal. Enid Zimmerman (1998) defines excellence as "the desire to achieve the highest degree of human perfection." However, is human perfection ever obtained, and thus does one ever reach excellence? Edmund Gordon (1999) offers a different approach to thinking about excellence. He defines excellence by a list of abilities such as the abilities to engage in critical literacy, demonstrate quantitative and scientific competence, and solve complex problems (p. 71). Consequently, excellence becomes connected to personal ability to reach or surpass predetermined markers of performance. From a group or institutional perspective, excellence can be measured through a set of predetermined academic standards, which are to be met by all persons. One might argue that equity is a precondition for fairly

assessing the extent to which the group or all persons within the institutions meet the standards of excellence. As such, debates about equity and excellence have expanded to include a different perspective, which suggests that the two concepts cannot only coexist but must be considered together.

Indeed, several scholars have discussed the coexistence of equity and excellence (Gardner, 1984; Willie et al., 2002; and Zimmerman, 1998). Charles Willie, Ralph Edwards, and Michael Alves (2002), in *Student Diversity, Choice, and School Improvement*, suggest equity and excellence are complementary, and together, they may produce educational eminence. They argue that excellence without equity leads to elitism and equity without excellence leads to mediocrity. The thought is that excellence alone creates a group of "haves" and "have nots," and equity alone distracts attention away from setting achievement standards and creates missed opportunities for those who are more academically talented to be challenged and pushed to excel at the highest degree. Willie et al., (2002) also recommend that equity be pursued if both equity and excellence could not prevail. Equity is recommended given their assumption that "a school that is fair to all of its students will help the least among its students as well as the brightest and the best."

Learning about students' attitudes toward academic placement and having students weigh in on discussions of equity and excellence in education, in general, will highlight the need for and inform efforts to treat students as educational stakeholders in monitoring, evaluating, and shaping future education equity reforms, policies, and practices.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter I addressed the question, "why are African American students historically not equitably represented in the upper-level tracks, ability groups, and classes?" I used historical

and contemporary scholarly literature to discuss the nature and reproduction of the underrepresentation of African American students in the "uppers," and I also presented measures, both legal and school level, that have been implemented for remediation. Further, I restated the lack of inclusion of students as educational stakeholders in reform and demonstrated some of their attitudes toward tracking and detracking as recorded by Yonezawa and Jones (2006). I closed this chapter with a broader discussion of the challenges, past and present, of implementing racial equity efforts that fulfill the mandates for equity and excellence. In the next chapter, I lay out the methodological framework for this study.

CHAPTER 3

MIXING AND MASTERING: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH TO ELEVATING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ACADEMIC PLACEMENT

As previously stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to explore Unit 4 high school students' attitudes towards academic placement; and 2) to engage their understandings of and solutions to the racial disparity that exists between African American and White high school students enrolled in upper level classes, such as honors, accelerated, and advanced placement (AP). This study is guided by the following key research questions:

1. What are Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement?
2. How do the African American high school students' attitudes toward academic placement compare to their White counterparts? What effect does race have on Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement, above and beyond the effects of gender, socio-economic status (SES), academic grade performance, grade level, AP enrollment status, and school affiliation?
3. How do Unit 4 high school students explain the difference in accelerated, honors and AP enrollment that exists between African American and White students, and what measures, if any, do the students recommend should be taken to address the enrollment difference?

In this chapter, I introduce the research design for the study and detail the data collection strategies employed. Particularly, I highlight instrument construction, recruitment, administration, and implementation practices, participant demographics, data analysis techniques, and representation and reporting of data outcomes. Further, I discuss the role of the researcher and tensions and issues that appeared while in the field. I conclude with presenting strategies I used for determining legitimacy, or credibility, of my results.

General Perspective

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research data collection practices was employed in this mixed method study to explore and generate a better understanding of Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement. This study combines elements of both fixed and emergent mixed methods designs (Creswell &Clark, 2011) and intra- and inter-method mixing approaches (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Initially, mixing occurred through an intramethod approach in which a previously collected high school student survey instrument that comprised both closed and open-ended questions was utilized. However, after the study was underway, it was determined that the survey data, alone, was insufficient for answering the guiding research questions. Thus, an additional data collection method, semi-structured interviews, was deemed necessary and later incorporated into a second phase of the study as a "complementary strength" (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Johnson & Turner, 2003) to the mixed survey. I chose individual interviews to follow the survey because I wanted to utilize a method that would allow me to a) create opportunities to probe and clarify students' responses and interpretations to my prepared interview questions and gain additional information and understanding of the previously collected survey data; and b) construct an intimate space in hopes that participants would feel more comfortable and speak more freely about my topic—presumably more than they would in a group setting—which is considered sensitive since it engages issues around race. This study also takes on characteristics of a parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) in which the mixed survey and semi-structured interview data are collected and analyzed separately, and meta-inferences drawn across phases are either avoided or made with special care; I do make some comparisons across data given I asked interview participants to respond to the closed-ended items I pulled from the survey. It was

necessary to process the data in a parallel manner given the interviews were collected four years after the survey, and the school district under study had changed quite significantly, of which the most notable change was the termination of the equity consent decree, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

I did not prioritize one particular method although the study incorporates more qualitative practices than quantitative. This structuring is due, in part, to the use of a survey instrument that was not originally designed for the present study, but for a larger district-wide study that attended to a host of school climate related issues. Extending the study to a second phase allowed me the opportunity to construct the interview protocol to be narrowly tailored to my specific research questions.

I valued students' multiple truths, meanings, personal vantages, "own words," experiences, and realities about academic placement throughout the study. Thus, presenting a unitary attitude about academic placement was not the intended goal of this study. Nonetheless, research findings, or results, do offer some insights into a) understanding Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement; and b) developing new, or rethinking current, policies and practices (e.g., implementation, monitoring and evaluation) to address a persisting racial disparity that exists between African American and White high school students enrolled in upper level classes.

Mixed methods research makes use of both quantitative and qualitative traditions (Creswell, 2011, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene, 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, 2010). These methodological traditions are characterized by different sets of practices, understandings, approaches, and, of emphasis here, nomenclature, or system of names or terms. As a novice

mixed methods researcher, at times I express discomfort with some of the main complexities of engaging and making decisions in mixed methods research: definition, paradigm, and nomenclature. The definition of mixed methods research has developed over the years. Early definitions emphasized the mixing of methods (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), while later definitions suggest mixed methods research entails a blend of not only methods but also methodology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Early on I knew my study would feature a mix of methods given I was using data from a previously collected survey and would be collecting additional data via a different method since the survey data was insufficient for answering my research questions. However, as my study developed, I started to think that mixing was taking place throughout different phases of the research process, from the refinement of purposes and questions to analyses and interpretations. This was a scary realization for me since I did not have much experience conducting mixed methods studies and would have to confront, as I perceived it to be at the time, the "messiness" of doing mixed methods research. I perceived the "messiness" to not only be negotiating how to move forward with thinking about mixing beyond methods but also engaging in a paradigm war. I asked myself—as I am sure other mixed methods researchers—"How do I uphold multiple paradigmatic views in a single study? Can I truly represent both a postpositivist and a constructivist perspective in the same study? What will quantitative and qualitative purists have to say about this?" These types of questions haunted me for quite sometime. In fact, I discontinued my use of mixed methods for about a year and a half searching for a better (read: less messy) methodological fit, but to no avail. I had to eventually embrace my study for what it truly is: a mixed methods study.

During my methodological nomadic experience, I did not consider the impact time lapse would have on my study. Thus, when I returned to mixed methods, as mentioned previously, I had to embrace a parallel mixed methods design since the context in the school district had changed quite significantly. Parallel designs hinder opportunities to mix at certain stages of the research process, namely analysis and drawing inferences. As such, I was able to soothe my paradigm worries by embracing Creswell's (2011) idea that paradigm be linked to a phase in a research design. More poignantly, I do not necessarily have to have a competing paradigms dilemma but instead demonstrate how different paradigms can serve alternate phases of the design. Thus, in my study, for example (Creswell (2011) uses a similar example), I could presumably honor a postpositivist paradigm for the first phase of my study that made use of a survey; and I could value a constructivist paradigm for the second phase that included conducting and analyzing interviews. I could then demonstrate how both phases, and more specifically, both paradigms, function to enhance understandings of my research phenomenon. Although my study features two phases for the design and makes use of different methods in each, I did not have to represent multiple paradigms. As previously stated, presenting a unitary attitude toward academic placement was not the intended goal of the study. Thus, I upheld a constructivist paradigmatic view throughout the study, including my use of the survey data, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

At times I struggled with what is appropriate nomenclature for mixed methods research. Term differences for qualitative and quantitative methodologies are very perceptible when considering sampling, data analysis, and legitimacy of implications and interpretations. In my mixed methods study, I wrestle with, "Do I use the terms associated with qualitative or quantitative methodology or a combination of both?" Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) offer, "We

believe that mixed methodologists should adopt a common nomenclature transcending the separate QUAL and QUAN orientations when the described processes (QUAL and QUAN) are highly similar and when appropriate terminology exists" (p. 12). They further state, the "decision to use either bilingual or common nomenclature must be made separately for each of the large-component parts of research methodology (e.g., sampling, validity) because the terminology in each is so varied" (p. 12). I take hold of their advice when making decisions about terminology and orientation. For the most part, I use terminology that is most common and appropriate for the specific methodological orientation that I am engaging at that time. However, I do occasionally consider alternative terminology—when available—that is acceptable to both qualitative and quantitative researchers or the use of new terminology, mainly parallel mixed data analysis and legitimation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006), developed by researchers in the mixed methods community. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) highlight other mixed method terminology, such as complimentary inference, qualitizing, ecological transferability, dialectical position, and multistrand design.

Data Collection Methods

Phase 1

Champaign Community Unit School District 4 2009 Climate Study High School Survey. In the Resolution Agreement (1998), which will be discussed in Chapter 4, Unit 4 agreed to commission a district-wide climate study to gauge the "temperature" of the schools. The first climate study was conducted in 2000, and a follow up climate study was conducted in 2009. As was the case in 2000, the 2009 climate study focused on perceived school climate by individuals and groups, not on a unitary objective climate. Emphasis was placed on individual and group perceptions of what happens in their schools. Parents, students (elementary, middle,

and high school), and school staff participated and offered their perceptions about the climate of Unit 4 via a survey, which was created to "examine the impact of racial issues on social climate in a public school district" (Aber & Climate Study Team, 2010, p. 10). Only high school student data collected for the 2009 climate study are utilized in the current study.

In 2009, after serving as a research instructor for the Champaign Unit 4 AP Scholars Summer Academy, I was extended an opportunity to join Dr. Mark Aber, professor of psychology at the University of Illinois, and the climate study research team. I came to the team with an interest in understanding students' perceptions of the climate in Unit 4 and their experiences in the schools. My participation on this team gave me greater access to the survey data as well as direct contact with students through conducting focus groups for the climate study. Since a great amount of data—useful for addressing my specific research questions outlined in this study—had already been formally collected from students, I decided to build my study to incorporate this data set into the research design. Thus, in Phase 1 of the study I took advantage of existing data from the 2009 climate study, which came to me in the form of a high school survey, featuring closed-ended statements and open-ended questions.

Survey administration and sample response rates. Eighty-two percent (82%) of high school students in attendance on the days the 2009 survey was administered participated in the survey (N=1800). Nine percent (9%) of high school students declined to take the survey. Only 1,447 African American and White students from the two Unit 4 high schools, Centennial and Central, completed the statements pertaining to attitudes toward academic placement. Therefore, 353 cases were loss, including the removal of students who did not identify as Black/African American, White, Bi-racial Black/African American, or Bi-racial White (N=276) or who were enrolled at Novak Academy (N=29), formerly Champaign Academic Academy, a small

alternative high school without a formal academic placement system. Students who did not identify as Black/African American, White, Bi-racial Black/African American, or Bi-racial White were not included in the present study, in part, because of the small number of students who completed the survey. As stated in the 2009 climate study report:

> Because of the small number of Latino/a, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, American Indian, multiracial, and other racial groups that filled out the student survey, results from these racial groups are combined in order to protect the anonymity of these students. This category is not meant to marginalize these groups' viewpoints. However, given the small number of students in each racial group, it was necessary to aggregate these results (p. B9).

Additionally, these students were not included given my research questions and the history of the consent decree, which contained legal agreements to address racial disparities between African American and White students. See Tables 3.1-3.7 for a demographic breakdown of high school participants by school, grade level, gender, race, honors/AP enrollment status, lunch status, and grade performance. The overall perceptions about the climate tend to mirror those of Whites given there are more Whites than African Americans and any other groups in each of the samples. It is important to note the following racial classifications, as presented in the 2009 climate study:

> Biracial or multiracial students who indicated "Black/African American" as one of their racial identities were included as Black/African American. Biracial or multiracial students who indicated "White" as one of their racial identities and did not indicate "Black/African American" as another identify were included as White (p. B9).

Data collected from both the 2000 and 2009 climate studies suggested biracial or multiracial students who indicated Black/African American as one of their racial identities had similar responses to those who indicated Black/African American only.

Table 3.1 High school participants, by school

School	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Centennial	838	57.9%
Central	609	42.1%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.2 High school participants, by grade level

Number of students at each grade level	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Ninth grade	386	26.7%
Tenth grade	391	27%
Eleventh grade	344	23.8%
Twelfth grade	323	22.3%
Did not answer/Marked more than one answer	3	0.2%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.3 High school participants, by gender

Student's Gender	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Male	749	51.8%
Female	696	48.1%
Did not answer	2	0.1%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.4 High school participants, by race/ethnicity

Race/ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Black/African American	466	32.2%
White	981	67.8%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.5 High school participants who reported being enrolled in at least one honors/AP class

Honors/AP enrollment status	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Honors/AP Student	1118	77.3%
Non-Honors/AP Student	320	22.1%
Did not answer	9	0.6%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.6 High school respondents, by lunch status

Lunch Status	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Family pays for lunch	983	67.9%
Receive free or reduced lunch	289	20%
Not Sure	159	11%
Did not answer	16	1.1%
All Participants	1447	100%

Table 3.7 High school participants, by grade performance

Grade Performance	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Mostly A's	540	37.3%
Mostly B's	520	35.9%
Mostly C's	284	19.6%
Mostly D's	48	3.3%
Mostly F's	11	0.8%
Did not answer	44	3%
All Participants	1447	100%

According to the Champaign Community Unit School District 4 2009 School Climate Study, teachers in classrooms administered the survey during regular school hours in late April and early May 2009 (Aber et al., 2010). Teachers read the questions aloud while students followed along silently, responding to each question by filling in the appropriate response bubble with a pencil. The survey took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. The high school survey instrument was comprised of 75 items, which included seven (7) demographic questions and 68 statements (See Appendix A). Though the survey consisted primarily of close-ended statements, two open-ended questions were included to allow for written comments. Suggestions and insights from meetings with key stakeholder groups such as community organizations, district- and school level administrators, teachers' union, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) council, and students (among others) were used to develop survey questions.

Three statements, as shown in Table 3.8, have been identified from the climate study survey and are utilized in this study as evidence for students' attitudes toward academic placement and the equity efforts pursued in Unit 4 to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in

academic placement. A Likert scale was used to allow students to rate whether they strongly agree, agree, neutral, not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with a particular statement.

Table 3.8 Sample High School Survey Items

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in.						
The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between Black and White students.						
Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years.						

In addition to these statements, two open-ended questions from the survey are considered in this study: "Are there other things you would like the school system to know about diversity issues? If so, please write your comments here;" and "if you have any comments you would like to make about this survey, your school, or additional comments about diversity, please write your comments below." Open-ended questions were optional, and students could write about anything in the provided space. A total of 55 African American and White high school students voluntarily offered comments expressing their attitudes toward academic placement and the equity efforts pursued by the District. See tables 3.9-3.15 for a demographic breakdown of high school participants who offered comments that are considered in this study.

Table 3.9 Open-ended high school participants, by school

School	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Centennial	37	67%
Central	18	33%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.10 Open-ended high school participants, by grade level

Number of students at each grade level	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Ninth grade	7	13%
Tenth grade	20	36%
Eleventh grade	13	24%
Twelfth grade	15	27%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.11 Open-ended high school participants, by gender

Student's Gender	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Male	21	38%
Female	34	62%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.12 Open-ended high school participants, by race/ethnicity

Race/ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Black/African American	10	18%
White	45	82%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.13 Open-ended high school participants who reported being enrolled in at least one honors/AP class

Honors/AP enrollment status	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Honors/AP Student	54	98.2%
Non-Honors/AP Student	1	1.8%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.14 Open-ended high school participants, by lunch status

Lunch Status	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Family Pays for Lunch	49	89%
Receive free or reduced lunch	3	5.5%
Not Sure	3	5.5%
All Participants	55	100%

Table 3.15 Open-ended high school participants, by grade performance

Grade Performance	Frequency	Percentage of Participants
Mostly A's	35	63.6%
Mostly B's	15	27.3%
Mostly C's	4	7.3%
Mostly F's	0	0%
Unknown	1	1.8
All Participants	55	100%

Responses from the open-ended questions are utilized to illustrate the numerical results from the closed-ended statements. Together, the survey data is used to address the guiding research questions as outlined in Table 3.16, Table 3.17, and Table 3.18, respectively.

Table 3.16 Research Question 1

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	DATA SOURCES/ MATERIALS	ANALYSIS
Q1: What are Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement?	Open-ended Survey	2009 Champaign Community Unit School District 4 School Climate Study High School Survey	Labeled Text Segments and Themes
	Closed-ended Survey		Statistical Analysis- MANOVA
	Semi-structured Interviews	Interview Transcripts	Labeled Text Segments and Themes

Table 3.17 Research Question 2

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	DATA SOURCES/ MATERIALS	ANALYSIS
Q2: How do the African American high school students' attitudes toward academic placement compare to their White counterparts?	Open-ended Survey	2009 Champaign Community Unit School District 4 School Climate Study High School Survey	Labeled Text Segments and Themes
	Closed-ended Survey		Statistical Analysis- MANOVA
	Semi-structured Interviews	Interview Transcripts	Labeled Text Segments and Themes
Q2-a: What effect does race have on Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement, above and beyond the effects of gender, socio-economic status (SES), academic grade performance, grade level, honors/AP enrollment status, and school affiliation?	Closed-ended Survey	2009 Champaign Community Unit School District 4 School Climate Study High School Survey	Statistical Analysis- MANCOVA

Table 3.18 Research Question 3

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	DATA SOURCES/ MATERIALS	ANALYSIS
Q3: How do Unit 4 high school students explain the difference in accelerated, honors, and AP enrollment that exists between African American and White students, and what measures, if any, do the students recommend should be taken to address the enrollment difference?	Open-ended Survey	2009 Champaign Community Unit School District 4 School Climate Study High School Survey	Labeled Text Segments and Themes
	Semi-structured Interviews	Interview Transcripts	Labeled Text Segments and Themes

Data Analysis. Closed-ended survey data were "cleaned, reduced, transformed, correlated, compared, and analyzed for inquiry conclusions and inferences" (Greene, 2007, pp. 145-146). Frequency distributions and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (or Covariance) (MANOVAS and MANCOVAS) were performed on the numerical data generated from the closed-ended surveys. Each closed-ended survey statement was designed to measure how participants feel about a pre-identified social climate dimension, such as Racial Fairness, which corresponds to items on the survey. At times, closed-ended survey items were treated as dependent variables to establish if some independent variable, like race or gender, had a significant effect on students' attitudes toward academic placement. I was intentional in performing analysis involving the race variable given the historical context of the consent decree. Thus, I performed two statistical tests: 1) a MANOVA to examine if participants' responses to the academic placement items differed across race (African American v. White); and 2) a

MANCOVA to determine if race was significantly related to students' attitudes toward academic placement, above and beyond the effects of other descriptive variables such as gender and SES. Open-ended comments were segmented and assigned meaningful descriptive labels. Labeled text segments were then reduced to avoid overlap and redundancy, and overarching themes emerged. An example of the data analysis for open-ended survey questions is provided in Table 3.19.

Table 3.19: Example of data analysis of open-ended survey questions and interview data.

Comment #	**Comment**	**Segment #1**	**Segment #2**	**Theme #1**	**Theme #2**
6a	As a result of the consent decree, there has been too much emphasis put on the achievement of black children AT THE EXPENSE of the education of children of other races.	Result of the consent decree	Too much emphasis on black children	Implications of the consent decree	All about the African American kids
Race	**Sex**	**Grade Level**	**AP Enrollment**	**Performance**	**Lunch Status**
White	Male	Eleventh	Yes	Mostly A's	Free or Reduced

Representing and reporting results and findings. Frequency distributions of responses to survey items are displayed in bar chart and table formats for easy readability, comparability, understanding, and interpretation. Results of the MANOVA and MANCOVA were incorporated into the Phase 1 results narrative. I placed the numerical results from the closed ended items in conversation with the qualitative findings from the open-ended questions in order to offer more in depth interpretations and illustrations and generate a better understanding of students' attitudes toward academic placement in Unit 4.

Phase 2

Individual interviews. Data for Phase 2 of this study were collected in the form of face-to-face, semi-structured, individual interviews. A semi-structured format allowed me to: a) engage and establish rapport with the participants in a face-to-face setting; b) change the order of or remove redundant questions on my interview protocol, as needed, in order to avoid disrupting the flow of the two-way conversation; c) provide explanations or context and/or tailor

vocabulary to accommodate participants' understanding of the questions; and d) follow-up and probe participants' responses for greater clarity and depth of information. The interview procedure is detailed below.

Access. Prior to enacting my recruitment strategy, I had to first gain access to the types of participants I desired for my study. In order to gain access, I completed and submitted documents to the campus IRB in order to assess the risks involved in my study and to receive formal permission to begin data collection. Simultaneously, I also had to submit documents to the Office of School-University Research Relations (OSURR)[10], which were to be included in the semester packets of new and continuing school-based research projects and delivered to the appropriate administrative personnel at the school board office for approval to conduct research within Unit 4. Upon initial approval from the IRB office and the OSURR, I was granted permission to begin establishing contact with the principals at both of the high schools, who had already been briefed on my study (as well as other studies) when they received notification, and accompanying documents, from OSURR that my study had been approved by the school district. The school principal had the authority on whether I could access students for my study at his[11] school.

Initially, I contacted both high school principals via email requesting a 15-20 minute meeting to discuss my study and receive permission to recruit participants from their schools. However, my initial email did not generate a response from either principal. A few weeks later—I did not want to appear as a nuisance and I recognized their busy schedules operating and managing a school of more than one-thousand students and numerous faculty, staff, and personnel—I initiated a second email contact, which generated some success: a returned message from one of the principals indicating he was interested in my study and was happy to meet with

[10] OSURR coordinates the placement of College of Education research projects in schools.
[11] The principals at both of the high schools were White males.

me to discuss my needs and how he could be of assistance. Unfortunately, after several email attempts, as well as phone calls, voice messages, and notes left with the secretary, I was unable to establish contact with the other school principal. Nonetheless, I moved forward with the one principal, and we met a few days thereafter, along with his associate principal. During that meeting, he granted me permission to recruit participants and conduct interviews at the school. He also appointed the associate principal at the school to be my primary contact person and assist me in whatever ways I needed to ensure the success of my study.

After the meeting with the principals, I proceeded to prepare an amendment to my IRB. The original IRB was prepared in advance of meeting with the principals, and thus, did not capture any of the details and best practices for conducting research at their school, of which we discussed quite extensively during our meeting. I remained in contact with the associate principal throughout the amendment process, as I wanted to continue building upon our professional relationship and go beyond having established access to also being granted entree. Upon approval of the IRB amendment, I notified the associate principal that I was ready to move forward with recruitment and data collection. We met during the school's spring break for about an hour to discuss the logistics for recruitment and data collection, to chat about issues around academic placement at his school, and to field the school administration's interest in my study and answer any lingering questions.

Sampling strategy. I utilized a maximal variation sample strategy (Patton, 1990) to identify interview participants. I anticipated having a small sample of student interview participants. Thus, I was purposeful in selecting students who could potentially offer differing perspectives on my topic of interest. Though this approach is sometimes viewed negatively because of the vast amount of differences among individual cases, maximal variation sampling

frames this as a strength, noting "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

Prospective participants completed and returned a pre-interview questionnaire (See Appendix B) along with their parental consent and assent forms (See Appendices C and D). The pre-interview questionnaire featured statements, such as "Your typical class schedule" and "Race/Ethnicity," in which prospective participants were asked to place a check mark next to the answer choice(s) that most represented them. Answers to the questions on the pre-interview questionnaire were then used to determine eligibility to participate in my study. I was particularly attentive to prospective participants' racial identification and curriculum placement level, given my interests in students' attitudes and experiences in the different levels of placement, e.g., academic, honors, and AP, and being able to make racial comparisons between African American and White students, who are the focus of this study. As such, I selected students who "fit" into one of the following six categories: (1) African American-AP, (2) White-AP, (3) African American-Honors, (4) White-Honors, (5) African American-Academic, and (6) White-Academic. Some of the participants I selected for interviews did not fit into just one category. Two students indicated on the pre-interview questionnaire they are bi-racial or multi-racial, and a few students noted they had taken classes in different curriculum placement levels. In those cases, and similar to the strategy utilized with the survey in Phase 1, students who identified as bi-racial- or multi-racial-African American were included in the African American racial category and those who identified as bi-racial- or multi-racial-White (non-African American) were included in the White racial category. Students who indicated that they had taken or were currently enrolled in classes at different curriculum placement levels were

categorized based on the placement level in which they took the majority of their classes. The students selected for individual interviews did not previously participate in the high school version of the survey described in Phase 1. These students were in middle school during the administration of the second climate study.

Recruitment of participants. Recruitment of participants was narrowly tailored in order to avoid as much disruption at the school as possible. The associate principal, in collaboration with the junior and senior guidance counselors, generated a list of approximately 25 students who met the criteria established for participation in my study. Each of those students was hand delivered a packet by one of the guidance counselors that included parental and participant assent forms and the pre-interview questionnaire. Students were asked to return the completed forms to their guidance counselor by an established deadline if they were interested in participating in the study. They were also told to contact me directly should they or their parents/guardians have any further questions about the study. Only one parent had further inquiries about my study, and she contacted one of the guidance counselors to determine the legitimacy of my study and to get a general sense of the types of questions I would be asking her child and how I would be using the data. The guidance counselor was able to field all of her questions given the counselor was familiar with the study by way of our formal and informal communications. In the end, the parent agreed to allow her child to participate in my study.

The deadline for participants to return completed forms to their guidance counselor had to be extended given only three prospective participants had returned their forms within the allotted time frame. I created a reminder flyer to regenerate interest in my study and had the guidance counselors' hand deliver one to each of the students on the original list. This effort proved to be successful, as an additional seven students returned completed forms to their

guidance counselors the very next day. It was then that I decided I had more than enough participants to initiate interviews.

Sample size. Ten interview participants from the original list of prospective participants returned completed and signed parental consent, participant assent, and the pre-interview questionnaire forms. Three additional participants were added toward the end of the data collection period, which brought the sample size to a total of thirteen interview participants. The three students were added to ensure I had at least one person represented in each of the previously identified six categories of participant types. I limited the number of participants in order to provide an in depth picture of each of the student's attitudes toward academic placement, manage the large amounts of data produced in each interview, operate within the window of time allotted to me by the high school administration, and remain within my research budget.

The participants. Thirteen high school juniors and seniors participated in the interviews. Eight of the participants were male and five were female. Six of the participants identified racially as White; five identified as Black/African American; and one identified as Bi-Racial Black/African American; and one identified as multi-racial Black/African American. Six of the participants were enrolled in mostly[12] honors classes; four were enrolled in all academic classes; and three were enrolled in mostly AP classes. I have taken several measures to protect the participants' identities by not revealing their school affiliation, replacing their actual names with pseudonyms, and offering limited profiles. The seniors who participated in the individual interviews graduated from high school in spring 2013, and the juniors are now seniors and preparing for spring 2014 graduation. The brief profile of each of the participants that follows in

[12] An honors or AP option is not offered for every class. Thus, students who take mostly Honors and AP also are enrolled in some academic classes.

the next section reflects self-reported information that the students provided at the time of their interview.

Participant Profiles. Penelope, a White female eleventh grader, moved from a small rural town to Champaign the summer before entering freshman year. She enrolled in mostly honors classes and typically made A's and B's. She played on the school's soccer team and worked a part-time job during the academic year. She did not qualify for free or reduced lunch at school. Penelope did not mention if she had siblings that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools or if her parents were college graduates. She spent her summer breaks participating in different service projects. After graduation, Penelope planned to attend college; she had already participated in nine college campus visits by the time of our interview.

Malcolm, an African American male twelfth grader, enrolled in mostly honors classes and usually earned B's. He served in a leadership role in one of the more popular organizations at the high school and participated on a school committee comprised of students, teachers, and administrators that was tasked with addressing equity issues and school policies. He qualified for free or reduced lunch. He had an older sibling that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools. He did not mention if his parents were college graduates. During the summer months he participated in a TRIO program at the University of Illinois. After graduation, Malcolm planned to attend an out-of-state Historically Black College and University (HBCU) or the University of Illinois and study finance or accounting.

Chardonnay, an African American female eleventh grader, moved to Champaign from Chicago at the start of her freshman year to live with her brother and, as she expressed during the interview, "to get a fresh start from the city life." She enrolled in mostly honors classes and generally made B's. She qualified for free or reduced lunch. She was involved in an arts-based

school organization and also served on a committee comprised of students, teachers, and administrators that was tasked with addressing equity issues and school policies. During the summer months she participated in a youth employment program. Chardonnay's parents did not hold college degrees.

Adilia, a bi-racial—African American and White—female twelfth grader, enrolled in mostly honors classes and typically made A's. She qualified for free or reduced lunch; however, she did not eat in the school cafeteria. She was not involved in any clubs or activities nor did she have a job. She had an older sibling that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools. Both of her parents were currently pursuing college degrees.

Chico was a multi-racial—African American, White, Latino, and Asian—male twelfth grader, who at times during the interview referred to himself as Black/African American. He was originally from the West Coast. Although he attended high school in Unit 4, he temporarily transferred to another out-of-state school but later returned. He enrolled in academic, or general curriculum, classes and made mostly C's. He noted he had never had a full academic schedule (i.e. eight class periods), for he played football for the school and had a job. He qualified for free or reduced lunch. He did not mention if his parents were college graduates. After graduation, Chico planned to attend an HBCU or automotive school.

Brady, a White male twelfth grader, enrolled in mainly honors and AP classes and made mostly A's. He did not eat lunch at the school; he participated in the open lunch period, in which juniors and seniors were permitted to leave the school grounds. He interned at his church and played golf and baseball for the school. Both of his parents had college degrees. He did not mention if he had siblings that graduated from a Unit 4 high school. He worked as a lifeguard

during the summer months. Brady planned to attend the University of Illinois to pursue a pre-medicine track.

Marcus, an African American male eleventh grader, was originally from Chicago, but had been living in Champaign since middle school. He enrolled in academic classes and qualified for free or reduced lunch. He did not mention the types of grades he typically received in his classes. He had two older siblings that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools. His parents did not attend college. He spent his summers working. Marcus planned to attend community college after graduation and major in culinary arts.

Elle, a White female twelfth grader, enrolled in mostly honors and AP classes and typically made A's. She did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. She sang in the school choir and performed in school plays. Both of her parents had college degrees. She did not mention if she had any siblings that graduated from a Unit 4 high school. After graduation, Elle planned to attend college and major in business or pursue a pre-law track, following the footsteps of her father, who is a lawyer.

Adam, a White male twelfth grader, enrolled in mainly honors classes and made mostly A's. He did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. He had two older siblings that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools. After graduation, Adam planned to attend the University of Illinois, where his dad was a professor, and pursue a major in the sciences. He did not mention his involvement in school activities or how he spends his summer break.

Grant, an African American male eleventh grader, enrolled in mainly honors classes and makes mostly A's and B's. He did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. He played football, track, and basketball for the high school. His older siblings graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools, but he was not raised in the same household with them. His mother had a college

degree, and his dad was in the military. Grant planned to attend college out-of-state and major in psychology.

Vanessa, a White female eleventh grader, moved to Champaign from out-of-state the summer leading into her junior year of high school. She was her own legal guardian. She was formerly enrolled in resource classes but transitioned into academic classes upon arrival to the area. She did not participate in any clubs or organizations at school. She did not mention the types of grades she typically receives in her classes. She had two older siblings, but they did not attend high school in Unit 4. Her mom had a college degree. Vanessa planned to go to college and major in photography and culinary arts. She also had plans to earn a certified nursing assistant's (CNA) license and join the US Army.

Mikey, a White male eleventh grader, enrolled in mostly academic classes. He did not mention the types of grades he typically receives in his classes. He was a member of the school's marching band. His older brother attended high school in Unit 4 but left and took the General Educational Development (GED) through participation in a local alternative school and leadership program. His mother was working on obtaining a college degree. Mikey planned to enter the Police Academy after graduation.

Carlton, an African American male eleventh grader, enrolled in mainly AP classes and made mostly B's. He did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. He sang in the school choir and performed in school plays. He had an older sibling that graduated from one of the Unit 4 high schools. Both of his parents had college degrees. Carlton planned to attend college after graduation.

Location and Room Arrangements. Interviews were conducted on site at one of the Unit 4 high schools over the course of three consecutive school days during spring 2013. Three of the

interviews were conducted in the College and Career Center (CCC), and the remaining interviews were held in one of the conference rooms. The conference room was not available the first day of interviews; hence, the CCC was utilized. Both spaces were private and quite ideal for comfort and audio recording. The CCC is a very colorful and lively, L-shaped space with college and university pennants bordering the entire room. The six-seat conference table, smart board, counter space, and the copy machine are located in the shorter end of the room, and a mini computer laboratory and counselor's office fill the remainder of the space. The conference room, on the other hand, looks like a typical conference room but with a long 16-seat conference table that nearly spans the length of the entire room. The conference room also features lots of under utilized cabinet spaces, a Coca-Cola barrel, and an over utilized mini-refrigerator that is filled to capacity; in fact, on one particular occasion I had to prop a chair in front of the refrigerator in order to keep the door from opening.

Participants were seated about three feet directly across from me at either of the conference tables. Two recording devices, a digital recorder and an iPad, were placed on the table in between the two of us. The digital recorder was placed on top of a stack of napkins in order to eliminate table vibrations. The recording devices, at times, were positioned much closer to the participant if they were soft speakers. I also had a notepad on the table to take a few notes during recording as well as copies of the assent form, the interview protocol, and the completed pre-interview questionnaire. Additionally, I kept a bottle of water for myself within reach in case my mouth dried given I was conducting multiple interviews each day and in many cases, back-to-back.

Periodically, however, there were a few minor distractions experienced while the interviews were in progress. For example, occasionally, a student would enter the CCC to meet

with the counselor in her private closed-door office, which was located in the CCC, or a staff person would enter the conference room to grab their lunch out of the refrigerator. Nonetheless, the participants never stopped engaging in the interview or expressed, either verbally or physically, discomfort from the distractions.

Scheduling. I organized the interview schedule to be in sync with the school bell system, which signals the beginning and ending of each class period. Typically, the first interview of the day was scheduled for 9:04am (second period), and the last interview at 2:28pm (eighth period). Each period was 50 minutes. I took into consideration participants' class schedules when organizing interviews. Participants provided me with their class schedules via the pre-interview questionnaire, and the guidance counselors furnished me with the schedules of those who did not complete that portion of the questionnaire. It was my goal to not schedule a participant's interview during a time in which he or she was to be in a core class, like math, English, or science. This accommodation, however, could not be made for all of the participants given some interviews had to be rescheduled due to no-shows or late arrivals, and some participants did not have full day schedules or took a portion of their classes at the other high school. Scheduling interviews in this particular manner was not a request from the school administration. It was my preference, as I did not want participants to fall too far behind in their classwork or miss the introduction of new material in their core classes, especially the honors and AP classes, which move at a much more rapid pace and in greater depth than course electives. Participants were hand delivered a letter that included their scheduled interview time and location. The letters also served as their written notice to be excused from class or a hall pass, if they had a late arrival to the location. Occasionally, a few students did get lost trying to find their designated interview location. Luckily, these students reported to the Guidance Counselor's office, and one of the

counselors escorted them to the appropriate location. In those cases, the interviews would begin a few minutes late and ran shorter than the others due to time constraints.

Interview protocol. Interview participants typically arrived to their designated location during class transition periods; thus, the halls were very busy and noisy. I, however, took full advantage of the transition periods—given the limited amount of time I had with each participant—by reviewing the assent form with the participant; requesting permission to audio record the interview with both a digital recorder and an iPad application, *Evernote*; providing a quick overview of my study; and engaging in other icebreaker conversations centered around "How's your day?" or "What class are you missing, and are you glad to be here with me instead of being in that class?" After engaging in small talk, which really warmed up most of the participants, I notified the participant that I was prepared to begin recording. During the interviews I followed a protocol that included a few targeted, pre-determined questions (See Appendix E). I also took advantage of my semi-structured interview design and probed when necessary in order to seek clarity and gain a more in depth understanding of the participants' comments. An example of a question on the interview protocol is, "Do you think schools need academic placement structures, in which students are sorted into classes based on perceived talent and ability? Why or why not?" I also asked each participant to respond to the three closed-ended items I pulled from the survey and analyzed in Phase 1 in order to make some comparisons across data, including context and methods comparisons.

At the end of each interview, I offered participants the opportunity to revisit any question I had posed previously and if they had anything that they wanted to share or add to the conversation. Afterwards, I formally acknowledged, "This is the end of this interview," and stopped the recording devices. Further, I thanked the participants once again for their time and

asked what they thought of the interview. The participant was then excused from the space and returned to his or her daily school routine. It was common for the next participant to arrive as the other participant was preparing to exit since most of the interviews were scheduled back-to-back. I found it interesting that it was rare for the two students crossing paths to know one another. One pair, however, did happen to be really good friends. The exiting participant even went as far as to exclaim to me, as he left out of the door, "Oh, you're interviewing all the homies!" I responded with a smirk and a laugh.

Duration. Interviews, on average, lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were intentionally planned to run the length of the class period so participants would not miss multiple classes. The shortest interview lasted about 25 minutes. The participant was fairly new to Unit 4 and, at times, had difficulty comprehending the questions I was posing—even after I would find different ways to present the question. Nonetheless, the participant still contributed meaningfully to the study. On the other hand, one of the interviews lasted about an hour. The participant was fully engaged in the conversation and very knowledgeable of the topic, and I was not prepared to end the interview at the expiration of the time allotted. As a result, the participant was late to his next class; however, he did receive a late excuse from one of the guidance counselors and was able to report to his class in progress without penalty.

Remuneration. Interview participants were offered a $5 gift card to McDonald's, known as the Arch Card, as a token of appreciation for their voluntary participation in my study. Arch cards were distributed immediately following a review of the assent form. Most participants were surprised to receive the token, as they had forgotten that I indicated in the consent and assent letters that I would provide them with a gift card to a fast food restaurant in appreciation for their participation. Thus, the use of the gift card as an incentive, in part, is not what encouraged them

to become participants. In fact, when I asked one of the participants why she wanted to participate in my study, she indicated that my topic was appealing since her sociology class was currently discussing education policies and also because she felt like most students would not agree to be in the study as a result of the bystander effect, feeling a need not to participate because someone else is going to do it.

Role of the researcher. It is important to discuss my role as the researcher given the interaction, influence, and relationship between the researcher and the participants and the researcher and the data, particularly with the qualitative components of the study. Qualitative research, in particular, suggests a need for the researcher "to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, any expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003)" (Simon, *The Role of the Researcher*). As a doctoral candidate in an education policy program, I brought into the research setting an understanding of the ways in which education systems and policies, at times, have historically benefitted White students, and have inherently disenfranchised others, such as African Americans and Latinos/as—an understanding that most, if not all, of my participants did not demonstrate in their comments. Furthermore, I entered the research setting with knowledge of my results from the 2009 climate study survey and a great grasp of the consent decree and the policies that resulted. Thus, my initial assumptions, given my policy background and historical knowledge of race relations in Unit 4 and the local area, led me to believe that the racial disparities in academic placement were largely the result of the policies and processes that maintained the placement structure, and it was the duty of the Unit 4 administrators to address what I perceived as a major problem with serious implications for going unresolved. As such, I, occasionally, found myself presenting a line of questioning, as reflected in both my interview

protocol and probing opportunities, that encouraged my participants to think of ways policies contribute to the racial disparities that exist in academic placement, asking quite frankly, "do you think a policy can be racist in form?" I typically received blank stares when I would pose that question. It was during those "blank stare" moments that I would insert a quick pause and think to myself, "have I gone off the deep end?"

I also recognize the impact that my identities as an African American and male may have had on my participants. For the most part, my first encounter with my participants was the moment they entered the room for the interview. I was not privileged with opportunities to really build rapport with them outside of our "small talk" icebreakers and probing during the actual interview. Thus, at times during the interview I could tell that my identities on display made some of the participants feel seemingly uncomfortable, especially when I would engage the White students in conversations around racial diversity or racial equity issues in education. For example, whenever I would ask a participant a question like, "Can you describe the racial diversity of the students in the different curriculum placement levels," I would occasionally get prefaced responses like, "I'm not a racist…but, most of the black kids are in the academic classes," or "I don't see race. So, I can't tell you about the racial diversity of the classes. I love all people." In response, I would either give them an occasional head nod as a sign of support to demonstrate that I am being open minded and listening, or I would ask them about gender diversity prior to raising questions about racial diversity. I noticed they appeared more comfortable discussing gender than race, so I would establish rapport with them on gender issues first and then ease into conversations around race. Nonetheless, I do think some of the White participants still held back on some of their more frank or candid comments out of fear of offending me. Building rapport with most of the African American students came fairly easily, in

part because of our cultural connections and also my ties to the African American community in Unit 4, which included, but was not limited to, research instructor for the AP Scholars Summer Academy, Algebra I instructor for the Upward Bound College Preparatory Academy, and mentor for the Operation Hope program. I had previously met three of the interview participants although I did not initially recognize their names from the recruitment documents. It was common for these particular students to enter the room for their interview and say, "Hey, you look familiar," or "I thought it was you when I read that name on the consent forms." The interviews I had with them appeared more relaxed, and I was able to engage and connect with them on a level that I was not necessarily able to do so with the other participants. They tended to be much more expressive and in depth with their responses.

Data analysis. I performed a preliminary data analysis, in the form of listening to data files and taking notes, after all of the interviews were conducted in order to determine the richness of the data, common vocabulary used by the participant, and major themes that emerged from the interview. I outsourced the transcription of each of the audio files to an online transcription service. Audio files were transcribed in full into text format, or data transcripts. Once data transcripts were returned to me from the transcription service, I proceeded to perform an "analysis by hand" approach to reviewing the data, in which I read each of the transcripts, while simultaneously replaying my audio files and making notes. I wrote a four-page summary of the general sense of all the data collected from the interviews after replaying all of my files and reviewing my notes. The summary allowed me to determine if the data was sufficient and supported my research questions. Afterwards, I returned to the transcripts and initiated coding, in which I segmented and labeled—with meaningful words or phrases—pieces of text to form a series of broad themes emerging from the data. The labeled text segments developed from each

transcript were then reduced to significantly fewer, more concentrated overarching themes. The themes represented the major findings from the interview data. See Figure 3.1, presented earlier in the chapter, for an example of the data analysis of interview data.

Representing and reporting findings. I created and displayed tables to demonstrate the range of codes developed for each major question identified on the interview protocol. Further, I exhibited findings in a narrative—and at times counternarrative—format, in which I exploited, discussed, and connected the emergent themes from the data to the appropriate corresponding key research and subsidiary questions. I was intentional in a) highlighting some of the major similarities and differences of responses between the African American and White students, students in enrolled in various curriculum placement levels, and context (2009 versus 2013 data) and method (mixed survey versus interview); and b) including multiple perspectives and contrary evidence to construct and support the narratives. Overall, the narratives represent the voices of some of the District's high school students' attitudes toward placement.

Strategies for Assessing Inferences

I used strategies, such as weakness minimization legitimation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006), peer debriefing, or inside-outside legitimation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006), participant language and verbatim accounts, and negative cases or discrepant data to assess the inferences drawn in this mixed study. The survey instrument used in this study comprised both closed- and open-ended questions; thus, the survey instrument design permitted intramethod complementarity, in which the strengths of one method had the ability to minimize any weaknesses in the other. For example, the majority of responses on a particular closed-ended question may be neutral, but comments provided for an open-ended question may offer insights or explanations for that neutral response to the closed-ended question. Peer debriefing, or inside-

outside legitimation, was also used to evaluate inferences. Peer debriefing provided for an "external check on the inquiry process" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) or an etic viewpoint (Currall & Towler, 2003). I identified three appropriate and well-qualified colleagues, "disinterested and trained in social research" (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 290), to participate in the peer debriefing, which followed after my initial analysis of data from both phases. Colleagues reviewed samples of interview transcripts and initial coding scores, raw results of statistical analyses, and a draft of my design and methods and results and analysis chapters. Colleagues challenged my biases and inferences that appeared embellished as well as highlighted content areas that were underdeveloped. Nonetheless, results of the peer debriefing were fairly consistent with my interpretations and inferences. I also utilized participants' "own words" and presented verbatim accounts of interactions, where appropriate, to add truth-value to the study. Negative cases or discrepant data were also documented to highlight any exceptions to patterns found in the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). I also incorporated informal strategies, such as contextualizing interview questions to assist in participants' understanding of what I was asking of them; repeating their responses back to them, but in my own words to ensure I was hearing and understanding them correctly (in-the-moment participant feedback); and allotting time at the end of each interview for participants to clarify comments or revisit questions.

Confidentiality of Responses

Survey data are currently stored on a secure online, password protected data storage system, accessible only to the original study's principal investigator and other members of the climate study research team. The data set was delivered to me pre-coded with each individual case assigned a numerical ID in order to remove any identifiable information. No effort was

made to identify any individual student's response for any purpose. Interview audio files were transferred to a password protected, online data storage system and deleted from the original digital recorder and *Evernote* iPad application. Transcripts were placed in a secured locker separate from the list of participant names and pseudonym matches. I was attentive to the level of detail and demographic data used to describe participants and their responses in order to protect their identity.

Human Subjects Issues

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application for Exemption and an IRB-1 Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects were completed and approved for Phases 1 and 2, respectively. I closely observed the principles in the Belmont Report in this study to ensure the respect for participants, beneficence and justice throughout the research process.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I presented the mixed method research design for the study, highlighting the use of a mixed survey and individual interview methods to address the key research questions. Further, I discussed the role of the researcher, detailed strategies for assessing inferences, and noted the methods I have utilized to protect my participants. In the next chapter, I provide a rich description of racial equity and race relations in the local area, and more specifically in Unit 4, in order to provide a historical and contemporary context for students' attitudes toward academic placement.

CHAPTER 4

"THE CONSENT DECREE WAS NOT THE END, BUT THE BEGINNING:" A PORTRAIT OF THE CHAMPAIGN COMMUNITY UNIT DISTRICT NO. 4

"In Unit 4, we are committed to the success of all students. We believe that high expectations for students, learning environments that support equity and excellence, continuous monitoring of student performance and high levels of accountability will ensure exemplary achievement by every student" (District Handbook, p. 23, 2011).

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the origins of Unit 4 and racial equity and race relations in the local community and the schools. Further, I detail some of the events that lead to the establishment of an equity consent decree to serve as a vehicle for implementing and monitoring efforts introduced in the school district to address racial disparities in educational policies and practices. I also present enrollment data over a number of years to demonstrate trends in African American student participation in honors and AP classes. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the post-consent decree climate. Information presented in this chapter provides a historical and contemporary context for students' attitudes toward academic placement and the equity reform efforts implemented to remedy racial disparities between African American and White students in upper level classes.

Champaign, IL

Known for its rich, black, fertile soil and flat land, ideal for easy farming and a great harvest, and the experience of all four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall), Champaign, Illinois is the larger half of a twin, micro-urban city.[13] One hundred thirty-five (135) miles south of Chicago and 124 miles west of Indianapolis, IN, Champaign is home to a world-class university, the University of Illinois, and several offices of Fortune 500 companies. Surrounded

[13] Urbana, Illinois is the other half of the twin city.

by farm communities and corn and soybean fields, and neighboring towns such as, Danville, Mahomet, Rantoul, Savoy, and Urbana, West Urbana was founded in 1854 and later renamed Champaign in 1861. Once a small town with just "a train deport, steam mill, stores, a church, and a post office" (McGinty, 2007), Champaign has grown into a college town with a vibrant downtown nightlife of bars and breweries, a diverse selection of restaurants, entertainment venues, such as the Virginia Theater, shopping centers, like the Marketplace Mall, a number of annual festivals, including the Taste of Champaign,[14] and several elementary and secondary schools, parks and playgrounds, a petting zoo, and the popular, Sholem Pool and Waterworks Waterslide, located on the west side of the city.

According to the US Census Estimate (2012), Champaign had a population of 82,517. The population was majority White, 64.8%, followed by Black/African American, 15.4%, Asian, 10.5%, Hispanic/Latino, 6.3%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.07%, Native American, 0.2%, and Multi-racial/Ethnic, 2.5%. The University of Illinois, Champaign Community Unit District No. 4, Kraft, and Parkland College are the top employers in the city. In 2012, the median family household income was $68,868, and 33% of Champaign residents were living in poverty (US Census Estimate, 2012). Politically, the current mayor is a Democrat, but the previous mayor was a tea-party[15] Republican and served three terms. The majority of Champaign registered voters have supported the Democratic Party candidate during the last five presidential elections.

Housing patterns trend towards African Americans, by and large, living in the area north of University Avenue, west of Wright Street, bordered by the interstate on the north, as a result

[14] The Taste of Champaign is a local spinoff of the famous Taste of Chicago held annually in Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois.

[15] The tea party is the ultra conservative, far right wing of the Republican Party, which emerged as a spark in outrage to the passing of the federal Affordable Health Care Act in 2009.

of de facto neighborhood segregation, including real estate practices. Most working-poor Latinos live "at a trailer park on the north-east end of town, the historical African American neighborhood," and others live "at another low-income neighborhood behind a major strip mall on the north-west side of the city" (Cruz, 2005, p. 47). College students live throughout the town, but mostly concentrated in residence halls, houses, and apartments close to the university campus, and university faculty and staff live mostly in middle-class neighborhoods (Cruz, 2005).

The University of Illinois

For many persons, the University "IS" Champaign and Champaign "IS" the University; they are directly associated. In fact, for many students, their only association with Champaign is the campus, and folks not from the area often immediately reference the University when asked about the city. This is often the case, in part, because it is THE main attraction to the area, and the campus is very large, and includes many features of a town, such as several restaurants, shopping stores, banks, medical center, gas stations, nightclubs and bars, exercise facilities, residence halls, apartments, hotels, entertainment centers, 24 hour veterinary medical hospital, and even a golf course and airport as part of the campus extension. Therefore, a discussion of Champaign, as a city, cannot be complete without a more in depth reference to the University of Illinois.

The University of Illinois is a public land-grant institution established in 1867 and renamed in 1885, spanning areas of Urbana and Champaign. A Tier I research, world-class university, in its 2014 rankings, U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Colleges rated Illinois the number 11 public university. The Graduate School of Library and Information Science, The College of Engineering, The College of Business, and The College of Education are ranked among the top graduate and undergraduate programs in the nation. The University is

also ranked #1 most “disability friendly” US campuses. Home to one of the largest public university libraries in the world, Illinois is comprised of 17 colleges and instructional units, 4 cultural centers, 23 undergraduate university residence halls, more than 1,000 registered student organizations, and one of the largest Greek-letter communities in the nation.

Illinois is a Big 10, NCAA Division I, Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) University with more than 425,000 living alumni, including Nobel Peace Prize winners, Pulitzer Prize winners, actors, college presidents, founders of websites, like YouTube and PayPal, and enterprises, like Playboy. In fall 2013, the University population consisted of more than 40,000 students, including 32,294 undergraduate and 10,080 graduate, and 1,024 professional students, and 2,500 faculty members. The student body is 55% men and 45% women, 50% Caucasian, 5% African American, 7.2% Latino/a, 13% Asian American, <1% Native American, 2.2% Multiracial, and 22% International.

The University of Illinois is a system of universities and has campuses in Chicago and Springfield, Illinois; the Urbana-Champaign campus is the flagship campus. A Board of Trustees governs the system, a President provides leadership for all three campuses, and each campus has its own Chancellor. The Chancellor of the Urbana-Champaign campus also serves as the Vice-President of the system. In-state undergraduate and graduate tuition is approximately $15,000 per year, while out-of-state tuition is about $30,000 per year.

Although at times experiencing a contentious town-gown relationship with the occasional reference from a university student referring to a local resident as a “townie,” the city of Champaign and the University of Illinois do have a rather deep connection. This connection is visible at athletic events in Memorial Stadium or Assembly Hall, cheering on the Fighting Illini, local worship services in which students are often provided transportation to and from, campus

or community programs featuring renowned speakers and/or musical artists, and conscious elevating events, like Speak Café, an open forum for self-expression through various forms of art, including poetry, song, and dance. Academically, the university has been awarded a number of research grants to carry out projects in the local community, and departments on campus have established partnerships with the local schools. For example, the Center for Education in Small Urban Communities in the College of Education conducts professional development workshops and consulting for area teachers. The university also facilitates programs and initiatives which include, but are not limited to, TRIO Upward Bound, TRIO Educational Talent Search, AP Scholar's Summer Academy, The Chancellor's Academy for local teachers, Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest, and the Youth Literature Festival. Faculty and students have also created spaces, such as Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) and Urban Reality (UR) Movement, to engage members of the local community. Registered student clubs and organizations have also engaged in the local community through volunteer work at shelters and soup kitchens, neighborhood clean up projects, reviewing high school students' personal statements for college, mentoring students in Unit 4, and providing tutorial services. At times, students have self-engaged in local politics and social justice actions, such as standing up for community violence and racial profiling by police officers, registering community members to be eligible to vote, and protesting a racists mural displayed in the downtown area, among other actions.

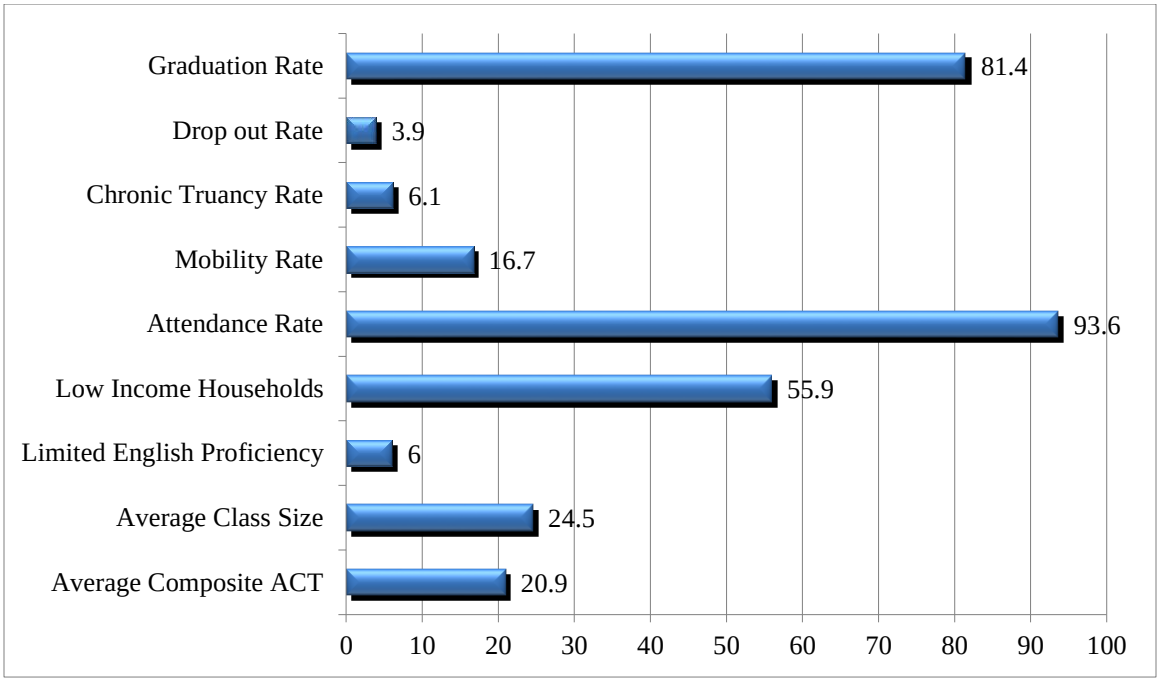
As it directly relates to this study, the University also played various roles in assisting Unit 4 and the local community in addressing racial disparities in the local schools identified under the consent decree and providing expert advice about school climate. For example, faculty members were asked to serve on various monitoring committees for the school district,

participate in community forums, and provide professional development for teachers and administrators. Additionally, Dr. Mark Aber, Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois, and his team were selected to conduct two climate studies for Unit 4 and offer recommendations on how to improve the school climate.

Unit 4

Champaign Community Unit District No. 4 is the public school system for the city of Champaign and an additional 80 square miles of rural territory. In 1855, Illinois state legislation was passed to orchestrate statewide public schools systems. Public schools erupted shortly thereafter in West Urbana, Illinois (presently known as Champaign, Illinois), and were separated into two school districts, District 1 and District 2. In 1890, the two school districts reorganized into a single district, Union District No. 6. The district was renamed Champaign District 71 in 1901. "After World War II, the state legislature took measures to encourage the reorganization of school districts into more efficient operating units. Champaign District 71 and twelve former one-room districts in the surrounding area were consolidated into Community Unit District No. 4 in 1948." Over the years, schools in Community Unit District No. 4 (Unit 4) have been closed, reopened, and reorganized for different purposes. The Board of Education, Superintendent, and Administrative staff govern the district. Today, Unit 4 consists of an early childhood center, 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, and an Academic Academy serving more than 9,000 students. Racially, the student body in Unit 4 is 41.2% White, 34.9% African American, 8.8% Latino/a, 9.7% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.3% Native American, and 5% Multi racial/Ethnic (Illinois School Report Card, 2012). Unit 4 has 704 teachers, primarily White (84%) and female (75%). The average teaching salary in the school district is $55,185. Other demographics for Unit 4 are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Unit 4 Demographics



Since this study focuses on high school students' attitudes toward placement, I will further describe Unit 4 high schools. Unit 4 has three high schools, Novak Academy[16], Champaign Centennial High School (Centennial), and Champaign Central High School (Central).[17] Novak Academy, a small alternative high school, was opened in fall 2008, to meet the needs of non-traditional students by offering smaller class sizes, individualized learning plans to accommodate different skill levels, and online and project-based courses among other resources. Students at Novak Academy (N=29) participated in the 2009 climate survey used in this study. However, their responses were not included in this study given the nature and design

[16] Formerly Academic Academy

[17] Unit 4 has also established the READY Program, which is for students, grade 6-12, with multiple suspensions and expulsions for misconduct. Some students attend READY for the full day while others attend for half a day and then their regularly enrolled school for the other half.

of the school[18]. Centennial and Central both have traditional systems of academic placement with different levels of curricula (AP, honors, academic, etc.).

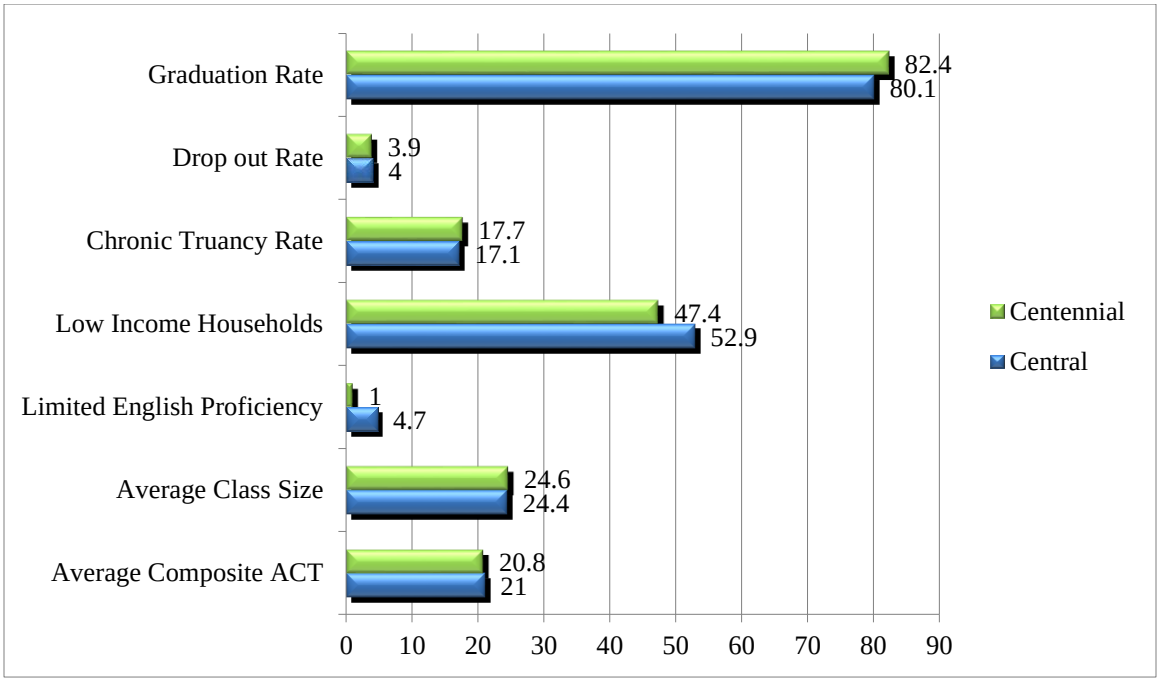
Central is the older of the two high schools with a history dating back to its founding in 1870 as West Side High School and later Avenue Grade School and then Champaign High School. In SY1964 (Read: School Year 1963-64), due to overcrowding at Champaign High School, now Champaign Central High School, several students were assigned to attend half of their classes at the high school and the other half at a local middle school, Jefferson. Two academic years later, SY1966, Unit 4 built a new structure next to the middle school, Senior High School Annex, to better accommodate the overcrowding of students, originally just for a selection of sophomores, but later the addition of an equal distribution of sophomores, juniors, and seniors in SY1967. The students at the Annex attended their full day of classes on site and on the same schedule as those at Champaign High School. In SY1967, Champaign High School was renamed Champaign Central High School, "Central," and the Annex, Champaign Centennial High School, "Centennial." The school district adopted a policy to add freshmen to the high schools in SY1978.

In 2012, Central High School had an enrollment of 1,307 students—43.8% White, 36% Black, 8.7% Latino/a, 7.7% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.5% Native American, and 3.1% Multi racial/Ethnic (Illinois School Report Card, 2012). Central, a two-time recipient of the US Department of Education "Excellence in Education Award," has a school day spanning from 8:05am to 3:20pm, several course offerings, including honors and advanced placement, athletic teams, such as boys and girls basketball and cross country, an award winning marching band, a school newspaper, the *Chronicle*, and several student clubs and organizations,

[18] Novak Academy only offers Level 1 classes.

like the African American Club, Thespians, and Color Guard. Central's juniors and seniors are permitted to leave campus for a 50-minute lunch break. Freshmen and sophomores split their lunch period with a supervised study hall. Academically, in SY2012, 17.3%, 12.7%, and 14.5% of Blacks were reported as meeting or exceeding academic standards in reading, mathematics, and science, respectively, as determined by the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) administered to students in Grade 11. Conversely, 65.1%, 64.4%, and 67.8% of Whites were reported as meeting or exceeding academic standards in reading, mathematics, and science, respectively, on the PSAE. According to federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) specifications, Central did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading or, mathematics in SY2012. Other demographics for Central are presented in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Unit 4 demographics, by high school



In 2012, Centennial High School had an enrollment of 1,459 students—48.4% White, 33.9% Black, 6% Latino/a, 8.2% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native

American, and 3.2% Multi racial/Ethnic (Illinois School Report Card, 2012). The Centennial school day commences at 8:10am, a few minutes later than Central. Unlike Central, Centennial has Illinois High School Association (IHSA) teams such as fishing, baseball, and bowling. Centennial has a number of course offerings for students at different levels of challenge, including foreign languages, as well as several clubs and organizations for students to become involved, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance, WYSE (World wide youth in Science & Engineering), and the African American Culture Club. The *Centinal* is the school newspaper. Juniors and seniors are permitted to leave campus for their open lunch period, similar to the students at Central, and they are also allowed to register a vehicle and receive a student-parking permit—a privilege not extended to the students at Central due to availability of parking in the area near the school. Similar to Central, bus service is provided for students who live 1½ miles or more from the school and where public transportation is not available. A large number of students rely on Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD) for transportation to and from school. Academically, in SY2012, 20%, 21.1%, and 22.2% of Blacks either met or exceeded academic standards in reading, mathematics, and science, respectively, on the PSAE, compared to 66.9%, 67%, 66.5% of Whites meeting or exceeding academic standards in the same areas, respectively. Centennial also did not meet AYP in reading and mathematics in SY2012. Other demographics for Centennial are presented above in Figure 4.2.

Race Relations and the Fight for Equal Educational Opportunities

"African-Americans have been a visible and active presence here [Champaign-Urbana] for most of the towns' histories," beginning with the black migration "with the completion of the north-south railroad in the 1950s," writes Jonathan Sterne in the essay "Scratch Me, and I Bleed Champaign: Geography, Poverty and Politics in the Heart of East Central Illinois" (2004). "Run

out of money" or "taking jobs along the way to Chicago" were common reasons for early settling in the area by Blacks, according to Jane Andrews Cromwell, as reported in Sterne (2004). Early black settlers lived in various parts of the city according to an 1878 survey, but by 1904, they were concentrated in the northeast area of Champaign primarily because, in part, federally funded public housing (and post-World War II housing) existed there, and the rent was low—and they had lower waged jobs—and "explicit segregation policies kept them there" (Sterne, 2004).

In "Reform in the Black Power Era," Joy Ann Williamson Lott (2009) states, "Champaign, Illinois, was a southern town in its attitude toward and treatment of black residents well into the twentieth century" (p. 307). Like other towns and cities in the south, north, and Midwest, Champaign was segregated and discrimination against Blacks was ever present (Sterne, 2004). Until the early 1960s, Black residents were denied counter space at local diners, access to hotels, barbershops, and residential property in non-Black racially identifiable neighborhoods, and were relegated to "Negro-only" sections at the local theater and other community spaces (Sterne, 2004). Blacks were also denied employment as bank tellers, sales clerks, and secretaries among other positions, and thus many found employment through the University of Illinois' fraternities and sororities and other service jobs (Sterne, 2004). Black owned businesses, such as restaurants, barbershops, nightclubs and pool halls, did exist in the northeast area of the city to accommodate for many of the services they were denied by white-owned establishments (Jefferson, 2010). However, due to red lining (practice of denying or charging more for financial services), many of these businesses ended since the Black business owners were unable to secure loans for development and expansion (Jefferson, 2010).

The University

Similar acts of discrimination were also occurring at the University of Illinois during those times, to which the first black student was admitted in 1887. Black students, who at the time consisted of a very small fraction of the university population, were barred from participating in sports teams with white players and living in residence halls until the mid-1940s, and prohibited from joining student organizations, that traditionally established racially restrictive covenants (Williamson, 2003). The University became more pressured to respond to campus racial climate issues and develop plans to increase the recruitment of Black students as a result of 1) an "increased demand for democratic rights at the end of World War II" (Williamson Lott, 2009, p. 307); 2) an emerging liberal student body and faculty in the early 1950s; 3) the establishment of a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); 4) the adoption of federal initiatives like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Higher Education Act—of which both included funding clauses and the later created opportunity programs for low income students, and 5) the mounting civil rights activism locally and nationally. To sustain pressure on the University to respond to the needs of Black students, in specific, and address campus climate, in general, a local chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) was established on campus in 1966, followed by an increase in more aggressive, "by any means necessary" action and voice from Black students, faculty, and community spurred by the Black Power movement and the organization of the Black Students Association (BSA). Additionally, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, was used as a catalyst "in increasing Black Power sentiment and promoting black student unity" (Williamson Lott, 2009, p. 310). This, in part, lead to the Project 500 recruitment program to increase the enrollment of black students at the university the following fall semester, and the

development of the Special Educational Opportunities Program (SEOP), which became "one of the largest affirmative action programs initiated by a predominantly white university to attract low-income black high school students" (Williamson Lott, 2009, p. 310).

Since the Black Power movement of the 1960s, the University has continued to make strides toward addressing campus racial climate issues through the development of cultural "houses," the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access, and the Inclusive Illinois initiative through the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR), which according to its website, is "the University's commitment to cultivating a community at Illinois where everyone is welcomed, celebrated, and respected." Nonetheless, the University still has its struggles attending to racial issues as indicated by the promotion of a now-retired mascot, the Chief, racial theme parties, like "Tacos and Tequila," hosted by fraternities and sororities, racial profiling of Black and Latino males by campus police officers, the occasional hanging of a noose on a professor's office door, and crime alerts, notifying the campus of an overly generalized suspect Black male, with a height between 5'10-6'2, weighing in the ballpark figure of 180-225lbs, wearing blue jeans and a grey hoodie.

Unit 4

The influence of race, race-relations, and climate also has a history in the local school district, Unit 4, in Champaign. Segregated residential neighborhoods in Champaign have been accompanied by segregated public schools, primarily elementary schools since there were only three junior high schools and one high school until 1967 when Centennial was opened. African Americans attended their "own" neighborhood elementary schools, Lawhead and Willard, which were staffed with African American educators, and Whites attended theirs (Johnson, 2005). Champaign junior and high schools were already desegregated. Unit 4 created the Equal

Educational Opportunities Committee (EEOC) to orchestrate an initial desegregation plan to address racial isolation in the schools and to recommend adoptable methods to handle educational problems derived from heavy concentrations of minority groups in some of the schools and "examine all of our programs and practices that relate to equal educational opportunities, and recommend improvements, changes, or modifications" (Equal Educational Opportunities Committee, 1976). The Coordinating Committee for Quality Education (CCQE)—a grassroots committee comprised of African American and White citizens, lead by a professor from the University of Illinois—also prepared a desegregation plan. Both committees, working independently and simultaneously, proposed similar plans, which included the elimination of elementary schools sited in the African American community and the implementation of busing students to schools in the predominately White communities (Equal Educational Opportunities Committee, 1967). Additionally, proposals suggested Washington School become a magnet school and "hot lunch" programs be added since students would not be within the vicinity of home (Evans, 2004). The People's Poverty Board, headed by Roy Williams and John Lee Johnson—influential figures in the fight for equal educational opportunities for African Americans in Unit 4—vehemently opposed the plans. They perceived uprooting children from the neighborhood schools and carrying them to other parts of the town was too harsh of a burden to be placed on African Americans (Johnson, 2005). The People's Poverty Board, however, did not have much support. "There were many people who felt that despite the fact that there would be hardships on black children, the ultimate benefits that they would obtain from this desegregation far outweighed those hardships (Johnson, 2005). In an interview for the "More than a Bus Ride" oral history project, one African American parent of four children shared:

> I had no problem with them being bused. The reason I had no problem with them being bused—I wanted my children to have the same opportunities as any other child had. My

> child didn't really have to sit in the same classroom with the white child but I wanted them to have the same material, the same books—not have outdated, worn out books, the same books. I had no problems with the teachers at Washington School—they was very good teachers—very good teachers but they was at a handicap because they didn't have the materials that they needed to work with.

According to John Lee Johnson (2005), essentially, "blacks felt that the overriding best interest of black kids were to attend schools with white kids...there was the overriding assumption—and this was brought about nationally by research that was done by the NAACP—that blacks inherently received an inferior education in segregated schools. And many blacks felt from the national scene down that the best way of improving the quality education of black kids were to put them in classes with white kids, that way you would improve the facilities, you would improve the curriculums and you would improve the teaching staff." It was a burden worth bearing.

The African American community (blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, church leaders, etc.) concurred with and signed off on the plan, which ultimately was implemented. "It was something that the black community welcomed" (Johnson, 2005). Though the African American community embraced the idea of transporting to the "better" schools, they were not always seen favorably at their new schools, specifically at the high schools. In an interview with Yakera Barbee in 2005, Al Davis, a former principal of Centennial High School, recounted some of the racial problems at Centennial during the early 1970s, most notable a race riot, in which a group of White students and parents waited on the lawn of the school for the arrival of African American students on buses. A host of reasons were given as to why the riot occurred, including previous altercations in which a black female was bumped and demanded an apology and third floor, hallway confrontations. Al Davis (2005) offered the following rationale for the riot:

> It was the feeling that- among white students- that African American students were not being disciplined. That they were getting away with doing things and nothing was happening. And so they were going to take matters into their own hands and try to resolve whatever the problem was. So it was a sense, on the part of the white students, that they weren't being treated fairly and that African American students were doing things and no disciplinary action was being taken.

The racial tension at the schools resulted in many suspensions and expulsions—debatable if African Americans and Whites received equal treatment for similar incidents as suggested by conflicted reports. Police presence was eventually enhanced in and around the schools, leading to a decrease in racially motivated acts (Schumacher, 1971; Kroemer, 1971; Rowland, 1971a, 1971b, and 1971c; and Mathers, 1971). Unit 4 grew more comfortable, over the next two decades, with implementing desegregation efforts, however, African American parents and community members continued to keep the pressure on the school district to ensure equal educational opportunities for African American school children.

A Change in Course. In 1993, John Lee Johnson formed the Committee on the At-Risk Student, which focused on pressuring Unit 4 administrators to "commit its fullest resources to eliminate educational discrimination towards the at-risk population" (Rahka, 2010). The committee established and proposed to the Champaign Unit 4 Board of Education 29 recommendations for addressing problems of the at-risk student. Recommendations included, but were not limited to, balancing the burden encountered through busing students across neighborhoods among all racial groups—not just African Americans, who were perceived as having the greatest burden; developing more culturally diverse curriculum; and hiring a more racially representative teaching staff (Affidavit of John Lee Johnson, 1996). The Board eventually approved the proposal and established a committee to develop a plan for

implementation; however, according to the Affidavit of John Lee Johnson (May, 1996), no action was taken to address the burden of busing or equity needs for at-risk students.

In 1996, John Lee Johnson and Herbert (Herb) Stevens—a newspaper publisher in Paxton, Illinois, who came to Unit 4 in 1988 and raised similar concerns as the Committee on the At-Risk Student—joined forces to file a complaint with the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights against Unit 4, alleging discriminatory treatment of African Americans school children. In August 1996, OCR initiated its own pro-active compliance review of African American over-representation in Special Education and under-representation in upper level classes, such as honors and advanced placement. In October 1996, the plaintiff class, by their counsel Futterman & Howard, Chtd., amended their initial complaints to allege system-wide discrimination in student assignment and other issues. The plaintiff class suggested that African Americans were victims of discriminatory practices, resulting in: the racial identifiability of Columbia Elementary School; the disproportionate transportation burdens placed on African American students to achieve desegregation in other schools; and they asserted "structural displacement" of students who reside in the predominantly African American residential area of north Champaign, caused by insufficient building capacity in that area.

In response to the alleged discriminatory practices, in November 1996, Unit 4 modified its desegregation plan, adopting the Redistricting Plan, which provided for five schools of choice, projected to be racially identifiable White schools and one school which would be racially identifiable as African American. Though racial diversity was promoted, it was not the only intended goal at that time. Arguing that the plan would only partially address their assignment complaints, in part, the plaintiffs considered commencing a class action lawsuit against Unit 4 challenging, among other issues, the student assignment system and the

Redistricting Plan. Legal theories identified in the challenge consisted of: the Equal Protection Clause of the US Constitution; US Code 42, 1981; Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and The Regulations promulgated under Title VI, Code of Federal Regulations 100.3. To avoid a class action lawsuit, in September 1997, the plaintiffs and Unit 4 agreed to adopt a controlled choice open enrollment system, which among a host of other considerations, "guarantees racial diversity, provides individual choice regarding school enrollment within racial fairness guidelines, and promotes school reform." Instrumental to the plan were the establishment of racial fairness guidelines, the creation of the Family Information Center (FIC), and the creation of full site magnet programs at Washington, Columbia, and Kenwood elementary schools.

Following the adoption of the Controlled Choice Plan in 1997, a series of activities, discussions, and agreements were formalized: Resolution Agreement (1998), Educational Equity Audit (1997-1998), Education Equity Memorandum (1998), and the Education Equity Implementation Plan (2000). The Resolution Agreement outlined a set of agreements between the plaintiffs and Unit 4 representatives to ensure African American schoolchildren were being provided equal access and opportunities to programs within the district. In accordance with the Resolution Agreement, during SY1997, Unit 4 commissioned a comprehensive education audit, "Educational Equity Audit: Findings and Recommendations," which highlighted issues of access, outcomes, and fairness in the areas of gifted and talented programs, special education, discipline, and staff hiring. The audit found African Americans were underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and upper level classes and were overrepresented in special education. Additionally, the audit revealed African Americans had comparatively lower attendance and graduation rates, received lower grades in upper level classes, and were overrepresented in disciplinary actions, compared to their White counterparts. The results of the equity audit, in

addition to other ongoing discussion and decisions made by the plaintiffs and Unit 4 representatives, were captured in the Education Equity Memorandum that established the creation of an Education Equity Implementation Plan, which was approved by the Board on June 12, 2000. The Education Equity Implementation Plan provided specifics as to the actions Unit 4 administrators were willing to take to create a more equitable educational experience for all of its students, particularly African Americans.

Not everyone was on board with the agreements and plans being made. A group of parents branched out on their own. However, after third party interruptions, in January 2002, an equity consent decree was enacted in Unit 4, responding to complaints offered by African American parents and children regarding equal educational opportunities in *Sa'da and TyJuan Johnson, minors, by their parent and next friend Felicia Johnson, et al., v. Board of Education of Champaign Community Unit School District #4* (*Johnson et al., v. Board of Education of CCUSD 4*), supported by OCR and a comprehensive education audit commissioned by the school district. The consent decree was a legal contract between the District and the African American parents (on behalf of African American students), monitored by Chief Judge Joe B. McDade of the United States District Court, Central District of Illinois, Peoria Division, to enforce the dispute resolution agreed to by both parties in previous years and "to mend a tear in the social contract between Unit 4 and the African American parents and students of Champaign" (Peterkin, Lucey, & Trent, 2004, p. 2) The agreement assured that Unit 4 administrators would make every reasonable effort to provide equal educational opportunities, thus, seeking to eliminate unwarranted disparities between the races, namely White and African American, with respect to student discipline, alternative education, special and gifted education services, student performance (i.e. grade distribution), and the hiring and placement of staff.

"The Consent Decree serves as a vehicle for intervention and improvement until such time that academic achievement is equal throughout the student populations of the district" (Peterkin, Lucey, & Trent, 2004, p. 2). Arthur Culver was recruited from Longview, TX to be the new Superintendent and see the school district through the consent decree and close the Black and White achievement gap.

Although the consent decree was a comprehensive, multi-layered agreement, this study specifically focuses on the agreement to eliminate unwarranted disparities in the placement of African Americans students into upper level classes. As described in the Education Equity Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) (2000), Unit 4's flexible goals around racial fairness in academic placement were:

1) Unit 4 students enrolled in advanced core classes will be within racial fairness guidelines at each grade level in each school.

2) By the SY2004 school year, Unit 4 course outcome and grade distribution for all students will approximate and be proportional to racial fairness guidelines.

Thus, a focus on the efforts around academic placement agreement, as considered part of the consent decree, serves to offer insights and build a narrative for how students are thinking about equity and excellence, in part, through their attitudes toward academic placement.

Academic placement in the District. According to the Resolution Agreement (1998) Unit 4 practices ability grouping in both of its high schools in the subject areas of math, science, English, and social studies, in addition to upper level foreign language classes offered at one of the high schools. The Agreement further explicates:

> In determining the most appropriate placement for middle school mathematics students and 8th grade students entering high school, the middle school staff considers such things as past academic performance, standardized test scores, and teacher recommendations. Once a student enters high school, year-to-year placements are based on past academic performance and teacher

> recommendations. However, students and their parents may request an alternate placement.

The policies that govern academic placement in the school district, as explained in the Resolution Agreement, are consistent with the traditional criteria for placement as often described in the literature on academic placement (Oakes, 2005). These policies, however, have historically produced a national trend of African American and Latino/a students being underrepresented in upper level classes (Ansalone, 2003; Archbald et al., 2009; Ballon, 2008; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Gamoran, 1992; Oakes, 1985, 1987; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009; Pool & Page, 1995; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; and Venzant-Chambers, Huggins, & Scheurich, 2009).

As previously mentioned, in August of 1996, the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) initiated a pro-active compliance review of African American underrepresentation in upper level classes and overrepresentation in Special Education. Following the OCR review, "the parties agreed that more detailed comprehensive analysis was needed to establish the necessary factual predicates required to remedy disparities. Accordingly, Unit 4 retained an educational equity consultant, Dr. Robert Peterkin, to perform a comprehensive equity audit" (Johnson v. Board of Education of Champaign Unit School District #4, p. 3, 2002). The audit, "Educational Equity Audit: Findings and Recommendations" (Equity Audit), revealed that, during SY1997, African American high school students were underrepresented in upper level classes in every subject area in which classes were offered. Data indicated that in SY1997, 9% of all high students enrolled in Level 3 (honors) classes and 5% of all students enrolled in AP were African American, although 26% of all students enrolled in Unit 4 high schools were African American (Peterkin & Lucey, 1998). In comparison, Whites accounted for 84% of all high school students in Level 3 classes and 85% of all students enrolled

in AP. White students accounted for 69% of all students enrolled in Unit 4 high schools. Further, data revealed 20% of African American students, compared to 68% of White students, were enrolled in Level 3 and 1.4% of African Americans, compared to 9.1% of White students, were enrolled in AP.

After the audit was conducted and presented to the district court, Dr. Peterkin was appointed by the Court to serve as the official monitor, responsible for providing "information and expertise to the Court regarding implementation of the Decree," in the form of annual reports (*Johnson et al., v. Board of Education of CCUSD 4*, 2002, pp. 15-16). With the assistance of data specialist James Lucey, student assignment expert Dr. Michael Alves, and, later added, equity issues in education expert Dr. William Trent, the monitoring team produced a total of five monitoring reports, providing status updates on goals and implementation efforts and offering recommendations to the court, the District, and the Plaintiffs' counsel. The first monitoring report was released in 2002. The report revealed that in SY2002, 9% of all students enrolled in Level 3 (honors) classes and 5% of all students enrolled in AP were African American, although 26% of all students enrolled in Unit 4 high schools were African American, which was unchanged from SY1997. Further, data revealed 18% of African American students were enrolled in Level 3 and 1.3% of African Americans were enrolled in AP, which was also unchanged from SY1997.

In 2004, the second monitoring report was released and revealed that in SY2003, 11.5% of all students enrolled in Level 3 (honors) classes, a slight increase from the previous year, and 2.3% of all students enrolled in AP were African American, a decrease from the previous year; African American students still comprised 26% of enrollment in Unit 4 high schools. Data also revealed that 25% of African American students were enrolled in Level 3, a 7% increase from

the previous year, and 1.4% of African Americans were enrolled in AP, which remained relatively unchanged since SY1997.

By the fourth and fifth monitoring reports, the sections *High School Course Level III Access* and *Advanced Placement Enrollment* were no longer included; they only highlighted high school course grade distribution. Nonetheless, subsequent data indicate that in SY2013, a decade later and four years post-termination of the equity consent decree:

1. Thirty-five percent of all students enrolled in Unit 4 high schools were African American.
2. Twenty-one percent of all students enrolled in honors were African American.
3. Thirty-four percent of all African American students were enrolled in honors.
4. Eight percent of all students enrolled in AP were African American.
5. Three percent of all African American students were enrolled in AP.

Since SY1997, African American high school student enrollment has increased from 26 to 35%; the percent of students enrolled in Level 3 and AP who are African American has increased from 9 to 21% and from 5 to 8%, respectively; and the percent of African American students enrolled in Level 3 and AP has increased from 20 to 34% and from 1.4 to 3%, respectively. African American high school students are currently (just barely-by one percentage point) considered represented in Level 3 relative to the +/- 15% racial fairness guidelines boundary, while they remain underrepresented in AP.

Unit 4 administrators credit the increase in African American student enrollment in upper level classes, in part, to detracking efforts—though the district does not use detracking language[19]—that have been implemented over the past decade, such as eliminating Level 1 lower level classes, identifying "high potential/low achieving" minority students to participate in upper level, college preparatory classes, and permitting self-enrollment into advanced placement

[19] Detracking methods in Unit 4 derived from a set of negotiations between the school district and the plaintiff class, in which the lawyers for plaintiff class presented a set of "Best Practices" to achieve desired outcomes in academic placement.

classes, for the increase in African American student enrollment in upper level classes. In addition, the increase can also be attributed, in part, to academic support initiatives and programs introduced in the school district, specifically targeting African American students, such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an honors opportunity and college readiness program targeting students in the "academic middle," "who have shown some promise and who, with support, can achieve success in accelerated classes" (District Handbook, 2011), and the AP Scholars Summer Academy, a seven-week program designed to prepare underserved students for AP classes and introduce them to research-based learning.[20] Considering the "good faith" efforts made and on going within the district to address the complaints originally filed in 1996, after more than a decade, Chief Judge McDade terminated the voluntary federal consent decree on July 28, 2009, with minor exemptions related to Special Education, and established the Education Equity Excellence Committee to continue addressing and monitoring equity issues in the school district.

In spring 2013, I engaged in an informal conversation with an administrator from Unit 4, whom is quite familiar with the academic placement structure in the local high schools. What follows is a description of the academic placement structure and processes at the high schools according to the local administrator and also per District Policy 630.07-R-SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND ACCOMODATIONS—Equity Monitoring for Elementary Enrichment and Self-Contained Middle School Honors and High School Advanced Placement/Honors level Courses, which was approved by the Board of Education in August 2008. According to the administrator, Centennial and Central have very similar academic placement structures; however, placement practices and implementation may vary slightly. Nonetheless, the administrator

[20] The AP Scholars Summer Academy is a combined effort with the District and the University of Illinois. The researcher of this study served as a research instructor for the academy.

described the academic placement structure at the high schools as "open." Students are permitted to enroll in any class of their choosing as long as they fulfill any prerequisites and meet any other established guidelines. Unit 4 policy also states that in addition to student self-selection, as suggested by the administrator, enrollment considerations include achievement tests, classroom performance, and recommendations from teachers and administrators, and parental input (630.07). Further the policy notes that rising ninth graders, who participated in honors classes at one of the Unit 4 middle schools, will automatically be placed in "the appropriate area(s) at the high school level" (630.07). As stated in the policy, "Parents have the right to make the final decision regarding their child's course selection" (630.07).

The administrator noted the personnel at the high schools do not use formal language like academic tracking and/or ability grouping to characterize the school's academic placement structure nor do they suggest the school operates under a detracking agenda. Nevertheless, different levels of instruction do exist: special education, Level 1 (remedial classes), Level 2 (general academic classes), Level 3 (honors and accelerated classes), and advanced placement. Although eliminating Level 1 classes was presented in the Education Equity Implementation Plan (2000) as a strategy Unit 4 would pursue to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in academic placement, Level 1 classes, such as Pre-Algebra C, continue to exist in 2013.

Another notable attribute about the placement structure in the high schools is joint course enrollment for honors. The English and Social Studies departments offer a joint enrollment program for their upper level classes for sophomores and juniors. Sophomores who are enrolled in honors English (World Literature) are jointly enrolled in a academic level Social Studies (World Studies) with the same students, and juniors enrolled in honors English (Accelerated American Studies-English) are jointly enrolled honors Social Studies (Accelerated American

Studies-History). The classes are team-taught. An honors level sophomore history class does not exist; however, only students enrolled in World Literature are permitted to enroll in World Studies.

The administrator also discussed the registration system for continuing students at the high schools. He noted one of the high schools' registration processes had recently undergone some changes. Formerly, during the late spring of each academic year, guidance counselors would visit a number of academic classes and make presentations to students about course offerings and the registration system and field any questions. During the class visit, students would complete a course registration form with their selected classes of choice. They would then be scheduled to meet individually with a guidance counselor to discuss their class choices and engage in a conversation around future college and career aspirations and post-high school graduation plans in general. The guidance counselor sought to ensure the student's classes were befitting for their future aspirations and met the minimum requirements to receive a high school diploma in the state of Illinois. Barring any discrepancies, students generally were assigned the classes of their choice. Under the new registration system, guidance counselors work in accordance with Career Cruising, an innovative career exploration software. Students complete an online Career Cruising assessment, and then the program offers students recommendations for appropriate classes to take that are in alignment with their desired career interests. Afterwards, students complete their online registration forms, indicating classes of their choosing, and meet individually with a guidance counselor to receive additional guidance on their class schedule. The master school schedule is determined, in part, by the classes students indicated they wanted to take during registration. The administrator I spoke with stated oversubscribing for the upper

level classes was not an issue and that the schools are generally prepared to accommodate more interested students by opening additional sections as needed.

Guidance counselors rely heavily on student choice and teacher recommendations as a means to address the underrepresentation of African American students in upper level classes, which is an issue that has been placed under the microscope in Unit 4 for the past decade. Students are encouraged to take upper level classes—especially if they have college-going aspirations—given most colleges and universities weigh considerably the challenge of course schedule and curriculum in the college application review. Additionally, teachers are able to make recommendations and comments about each of their students through an online system, in which the guidance counselors are able to review and consider during class scheduling. These efforts may be somewhat helpful in the recruitment of African American students into upper level classes, but the issue of recruiting *and* retaining the students in the classes lingers. According to the administrator, getting students to enroll in an upper level class and academic mobility are both huge problems at the high schools. The challenge with getting students to enroll in upper level classes has posed an issue since, "some students would rather take the 'easiest' route to high school completion in order to protect their grades," as suggested by the administrator. Mobility has posed a huge challenge because once some of the students are enrolled in the upper level classes and get a "taste" of the curriculum and culture, they consider dropping down to a different curriculum level. For example, the administrator pointed out that some of the students do not complete the required summer projects, papers, and readings for some of the advanced classes and therefore start the semester with zeros on major assignments that can really impact their overall grade for the class; or, some students get overwhelmed with trying to balance the advanced classes with athletics. Thus, dropping the advanced classes

becomes a very considerable option in order for them to "stay above water" both academically and emotionally. In order to move down, a student must get written permission from his or her parents, meet with an administrator and a member of the Honors Support Team, which is comprised of a campus level administrator, counselor, and teacher, and complete a course withdrawal form to be kept on file. The Honors Support Team makes sure the student has thought through his or her decision and discusses the potential impact and/or implications for such actions (college admissions, GPA, class rank, etc.). The policy also states:

> The building principal has the authority to designate the course as dropped without penalty. Rationale: The District is committed to providing access and support to African American and other underserved student populations in honors level courses. At times the placement in a course may not be in a student's best academic interest but this conclusion can be difficult to come to within the regular timeframe. In these situations the District reserves the right to correct the placement without penalty to the student. (630.07)

It is also worth noting that moving up a curriculum level is very rare, in part, because often students in general academic classes, by design, do not meet the prerequisites established for the more advanced classes.

The high schools offer a host of voluntary programs and opportunities to support students needing additional assistance with any of their classes, especially the upper level classes. Such supports include, but are not limited to, English and mathematics supplemental courses, tutoring, cohort groups, and, as previously mentioned, the AVID program. According to district policy 630.07, "The District will support the enrollment of African American and other underserved student populations by scheduling students in cohort groups. Principals will be required to review student schedules prior to the start of the school year to ensure cohort groups are in place." AVID, among other objectives, is a program/system designed to provide students, in the academic middle, with in-school support in college preparatory classes. According to the "Plan

Implementation and Monitoring" section of the Unit 4 policy on high school honors/AP, "Teachers, counselors, and administrators will work diligently to encourage and support students to participate in AVID as a means to help bolster academic skills necessary for honors/AP level courses once exiting middle school as well as those high school students advancing on to college" (630.07). The administrator notes most students, however, do not take advantage of the supports that are offered. For example, the administrator indicated that, generally, only freshmen and sophomores take advantage of enrolling in within-school programs like AVID primarily because they are used to participating in the program in middle school. Otherwise, the administrator suggests that it is a struggle to get students to fully participate in the additional services. The schools' personnel have recently adopted a more career-focused approach to encouraging students to enroll in upper level classes and to take advantage of the support services and opportunities that are available to students, in most cases, free of charge.

Intervention methods for struggling students, particularly African American and other underserved student populations enrolled honors and AP, are also incorporated into the academic placement structure at the high schools. Each school is required to develop a weekly academic watch list, in which all African American and other underserved students who are receiving a grade of C (74% or below) or lower in their upper level class are identified. The list is then shared with school level administrators and personnel on the student's Honors Support Team, and the student's teacher notifies the student's parents via phone or email and follows up through interim progress reports. Teachers and counselors are required to document any meetings that occur in which the discussion is about or with African American and other underserved student populations in honors/AP courses. Students on the list receive additional school level intervention and support through counseling, tutoring, and AVID to help them bring up their

grades. According to the 2009 climate study report (Aber et al., 2010), some teachers and staff expressed frustration with this level of intervention, as illustrated in the two comments below:

> I find it insulting that I have to explain if more A[frican]A[merican]students get low grades than white students. I do not grade their tests or assessment s any differently than I do other students in the class. (p. 46)

> In addition, the amount of paperwork that is being demanded from teachers is taking away critical time that teachers could spend planning and responding to student work. Too much valuable time is being wasted on unnecessary paperwork. (p. 46)

Notably, the ways in which the administrator describes the issues around recruiting and retaining African American students in upper level classes is quite different from the framing of the problem by the African American parents and community under the consent decree. The African American parents suggested that the racial differences in enrollment in upper level classes appear to be the result of criteria used for placement and practices by school staff that fail to identify and place African American students in the upper level classes. As such, the consent decree frames the racial disparity in upper level classes in a way that seeks to hold Unit 4 accountable for reassessing criteria used for placement and developing new methods to better identify African American students for upper level classes. However, what I interpreted from the administrator's comments was that the students do not want to be in the upper level classes because they are not willing to do the work required to be successful in the classes; they are apprehensive about enrolling in a more challenging curriculum for fear of failure; and they are not willing to take advantage of the ways in which the school personnel has put in place opportunities to support them; and therefore, the African American students are the primary contributors to their own underrepresented status in upper level classes.

During our conversation, the administrator never once suggested possible inconsistencies and weaknesses in the delivery and implementation of the support services; difficulties

surrounding completing summer projects for students who typically have summer employment and athletic training; challenges of being perhaps a prospective first generation college student who does not understand the college admissions system and the value of enrolling in more challenging classes; or cultural challenges presented in upper level classes. My observation and interpretation are not to suggest that the administrator is not aware of some of the challenges I have just listed, but to acknowledge that he/she may not understand, or give as much attention to, the significance and magnitude of the challenges faced by students, African Americans in particular, the inequities institutionalized within school policies and practices, or poor quality of programs and supports that may be intended for good yet have adverse effects.

Unit 4 Climate

Leading up to the consent decree, an agreement to conduct a district-wide climate study was made. According to the Resolution Agreement (1998), Unit 4 agreed, "a school which promotes learning and success and encourages students to support each other is essential" in order "to ensure equal access for African American students to its educational programs." Therefore, the school district agreed to commission a climate survey to gauge "the temperature" of the schools, primarily focusing on issues of fairness. Parents, students, and school staff participated and offered their perceptions about the climate of Unit 4. The climate study focused on perceived school climate by individuals and groups, not on a unitary objective climate. Results of the climate survey conducted in 2000 suggested, overall, school staff, parents, and elementary students' perceptions of the school climate were fairly positive, different from middle and high school students who offered more neutral to negative perceptions (Aber et al., 2000). Disaggregated by race, results indicated that African Americans' (staff, parents, middle and high school students alike) perceptions of the school climate were significantly more negative than

Whites' (Aber et al., 2000). A follow-up climate survey was agreed to in January 2008 and administered in spring 2009. However, the results of the 2009 climate study were not available at the time of the consent decree termination ruling on November 4, 2009.

Results from the 2009 survey indicated that overall, school staff perceived the climate in very positive terms, with parents and students providing slightly less positive perceptions (Aber et al., 2010). When examined separately for Whites and African Americans, white parents had the most favorable view of the climate, followed by White staff. The most negative views of the climate were held by African American high school students, followed by African American staff then parents (Aber et al., 2010). Further, "students perceived less Trust and Respect[21] less Racial Fairness, more Need to Address Racial Issues, less improved safety due to presence of the SROs [School Resource Officers] and reported more frequent Experiences of Racism" (Aber et al., 2010, p. 22).

The 2000 and 2009 climate study reports also provide more specific data, primarily from staff and parents, directly connected to my study on perceptions of fairness in academic placement and on Unit 4 administrators' efforts to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in upper level classes, which provides additional context for discussing, analyzing, and making sense of high school students' perceptions of and experiences with detracking reform. Compared to the 2000 climate study, more African American staff in 2009 disagreed that "all students are treated fairly," an increase from 28% to 39%, while White staff perceptions on the same scale remained relatively the same, below 10% in both years, yet markedly different from African American staff. African American and White parents' perceptions on this scale were similar to that of staff, with African American parents exhibiting an increase in disagreement from 22% to

[21] Climate Dimensions

33% and White parents' expressing disagreement, remaining at or slightly below 15% in both years. African American staff drastically differed in perception from White staff agreeing that there is a "need to change the school system to better address racial disparities," 64% to 8%, respectively, in 2000, and 57% to 12% in 2009. Gaps in perceptions on this scale were also identifiable among parents, in which African American parents were more likely to agree that schools need to better address racial disparities than were White parents, 51% to 6% in 2000, compared to 47% to 11% in 2009. Also, more White staff in 2009 than in 2000, 52% to 35%, perceive it is "Important" or "Very Important" for Unit 4 schools to promote qualities of desegregated schools, such as a more diverse and representative teaching and administrative staff and upper level class and special education enrollment, as well as teaching culture sensitivity and a culturally diverse curricula; 83% of African American staff in 2000, and 90% in 2009, offered similar perceptions about the importance promoting the qualities of desegregated schools. Similarly, yet greater, in 2009, 98% of African American parents perceived it Important or Very Important to promote qualities of desegregated schools compared to 45% of White parents.[22]

The 2009 climate study report also illustrates some of the previous data through comments provided by staff and parent participants. Comments provided under the section titled "Evaluations of the Merits of the Consent Decree" are of particular interest here. This section highlights some of the sentiments generated towards the consent decree with some parents and staff offering comments of (partial) support, like "I was a big supporter of the Consent Decree (CD) at its inception. However, over time it has become a force of harm rather than one of good" (p. 42). Most comments, however, suggested "the consent decree was a failure" (Aber, et al., p. 42, 2010). For example, one participant's comment featured in the report stated, "I do think that

[22] The 2000 climate study report collapses the categories for this scale. Thus, a direct comparison is not presented here.

the Consent Decree has resulted in more distrust, lower academic standards all across the board, and a reduction in resources available to help students" (p. 42). The report also brings forward staff and parents' perceptions that the consent decree produced negative consequences such as unfair, if not non-existent, disciplinary practices and lowered academic standards in order to fulfill racial "quotas." One teacher commented, "I believe that the consent decree has tied our hands as teachers. We have students placed in classes that are above their ability level purely to meet quotas. That does NOT benefit the students" (p. 45). Though several participants made similar comments to these in the study, "it is worth noting that many viewed increased access to such courses as a very positive outcome" (Aber et al., p. 45, 2010). Nonetheless, the comments presented in the report do reflect some of the fears and concerns generated towards school districts, policy makers, and reformers implementing methods to address issues of racial equity and excellence in education, in general, and eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in academic placement in Unit 4 schools.

Beyond my general interest as derived from interacting with Unit 4 high school students,[23] I focus on the agreement to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in academic placement and its accompanying flexible goals (primarily the first goal). This focus is not only consistent with the overall purposes of the study, but it also speaks to the results of the 2009 climate study, in which access to upper level classes by African Americans is the second most frequently cited issue relating to the consent decree. Thus, this study is an exploration of Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement, and more specifically racial

[23] The researcher of this study has worked with students from Unit 4 in the capacity of research instructor for the AP Summer Scholars Academy and as an instructor with the Upward Bound College Preparatory Summer Residency Program.

disparities in the upper level classes and the equity reform efforts put forth within the school district to address the problem.

Though a great portion of this study focuses on actions in Unit 4 during the consent decree time period, 2002-2009, and the 2009 climate study report, preliminary findings suggested a need for additional evidence to better address the guiding research questions. Consequently, new data was collected from high school students in the form of individual interviews. Individual interviews were conducted during the 2013 spring academic semester, four years post-consent decree. As a result of the time lapse between the data collected in 2009 and 2013, the class of 2013 had yet to enter high school when the consent decree was terminated and they may not be as familiar with the changes that had taken place around academic placement in Unit 4 high schools. Therefore, I take into consideration what I may associate as changes in academic placement—from the research investigator perspective—could very well be perceived by my participants (individual interview participants in particular) as the norm, reflecting the only placement processes and structures that they have ever known.

I also take into consideration the ways in which Unit 4 has modified, continued, and/or built upon policies and practices since the consent decree. A few years ago, when the prospects were great the consent decree would be ending soon, anxiety within the African American community was high. As one African American parent stated in the local newspaper, the News Gazette, "We're scared. The trust level is low." The same parent further stated, "The fear is, when the judge stops looking, are you going to pull the rug out from under us" (Heckel, September 25, 2009, para 2). Several persons in the African American community shared this sentiment, expressing fear that their voices and presence may be excluded from future conversations and monitoring opportunities concerning equity related issues in the school

district. Further, they feared that policies and practices that had been enacted during the consent decree would be regressed. To curb some of the fears of the African American community, then superintendent, Arthur Culver, reassured parents in the News Gazette that "we have no plans of dismantling those things" (Heckel, June 1, 2009, para 11) that had been put into place during the consent decree. Additionally, the Planning and Implementation Committee (PIC), which was established under the consent decree to monitor equity issues in the District, was transformed—post-consent decree, into the Education Equity Excellence Committee (EEE), to continue formal dialogue between the District and the community. According to one news article, some members of the African American community insisted that the EEE committee be comprised of at least 51% African American people in order to "adequately represent the interests of black students, or allow the black community the same voice it has had through PIC" (Heckel, September 25, 2009, para 4). However, the school board contended that the committee be a diverse cross section of the school population. The displeasure for the decision to make the committee more multicultural reflected in the initial call for community members to submit applications to join the committee (Heckel, September 25, 2009). Towards the end of the filing period only three applications had been submitted (Heckel, October 31, 2009). Trust in Unit 4, at least from some in the African American community, remained relatively low (Heckel, September 25, 2009).

Unit 4 administrators have established different ways to continue building trust and engaging the community in school affairs, post consent decree. For example, the Superintendent hosts quarterly "Supper with the Superintendent" events, in which community members are encouraged to join the superintendent for informal dialogue around a host of topics over dinner[24]. Other on-going community engagement opportunities include, but are not limited to,

[24] The first supper was held in March 2012.

participation in monthly Social Justice Committee meetings, Schools of Choice forums, school board meetings, online "general in-put" surveys, social media interactions, such as Twitter and Facebook, and the Great Schools, Together initiative. The Family Information Center continues to play a significant role in facilitating information about programs in Unit 4 and school assignment.

Some of the most visible differences in Unit 4, post-consent decree, are changes in the administration. Arthur Culver, former Superintendent, and Dorland Norris, former Deputy Superintendent, announced their resignations in June 2011 and October 2011, respectively. An administrative change was highly expected, post-consent decree, considering the former administrators were both brought in from a school district in Longview, TX primarily to lead the school district through the consent decree and work to close the achievement gap between Black and White students. Since his departure, Culver has been appointed by the Illinois State Board of Education to be superintendent of East St. Louis School District 189 in October 2011, and Norris decided to join him in East St. Louis to become his Deputy Superintendent once again. Dr. Judy Wiegand, former principal at Centennial High School and Assistant Superintendent for Achievement and Pupil Service, was named the new superintendent in December 2011 after an extensive and open search, which included input from the community to express what qualities and experiences they were looking for in the next superintendent. The goals outlined in her contract include, but are not limited to, "community engagement, better communication between the school district and community members, improving academics, including career and technical education and implementing the Common Core State Standards, (which need to be in place by SY2014), providing technology to all students and building and maintaining efficient

buildings" (News Gazette). These goals reflect some of Unit 4's commitments, especially to ongoing engagement with the community in a post-consent decree era.

Programmatically, Unit 4 administrators have launched some new academic and social support programs and initiatives at the high schools as well as continued some previously implemented during the consent decree era. These programs and initiatives primarily target African American students and aim to address the Black and White achievement gap, NCLB standards, and racial enrollment disparities in upper level classes. Such programs and initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- Operation Hope—a career readiness, college preparation, and mentoring program;
- College Preparatory Math (CPM)—a mathematics curriculum utilized at both of the high schools to meet Common Core State Standards and provide support material for teachers, parents, and students;
- Social Action Committee—a collaborative for students and faculty to engage in discussions and propose and implement various initiatives to address social justice issues at school;
- Social Justice Seminar—a half credit honors level class for juniors and seniors, in which students 1) develop an understanding of systems of power and social justice issues in the community and 2) examine fairness and equity issues through inquiry and project-based learning;
- African American Club—a welcoming and supportive space for students to engage in the African American cultural experience;
- Supplemental Education Tutoring Services—as a result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, students who receive free/reduced lunch are eligible to have their tutoring service fees waived;
- Building and Intervention Teams (BIT)—"a problem-solving team designed to increase student achievement and/or improve behavior via research based interventions and data-driven decision making" (District Handbook, 2011, p. 33); and
- AVID, of which I previously described.

Unit 4 no longer offers the AP Scholars Summer Academy, which was established to prepare African American students for advanced placement courses and provide them with research experience. External programs and spaces, such as Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), Tap In Leadership Academy, Youth Community Informatics (YCI), Upward Bound

Preparatory Academy, and Education Talent Search, continue to serve as outlets for students, particularly African American students, to develop academically, socially, and emotionally.

Organizationally, Unit 4's enrollment is growing; the Discipline Task Force and AP/Honors Equity Task Force are still working to enhance the disciplinary system and monitoring access to upper level classes; and the Education Equity Excellence (EEE) Committee still meets once every quarter to review school data and discuss recommendations from the climate study report and other equity issues in the school district. Controlled choice remains the school assignment program for Unit 4, but assignment criteria was recently modified to consider income instead of race. Further, parents and students have freedom in choosing and/or petitioning class selections and placement. As stated previously, although Level 1, lower level classes, were to be "eliminated," according to the Education Equity Implementation Plan, high school students are still being enrolled in classes like Pre-Algebra C when the Level 2, academic level class for high school students is typically Algebra I.

Although four years removed, the consent decree is still fresh on the minds of administrators, teachers, parents, and some students. Though folks "hands aren't as tied" and their every move is not under a microscope, treading forward lightly and mindfully seems to be the response after nearly a decade of close court monitoring. Overall, Unit 4 appears to be in a rather comfortable place, especially as it relates to eliminating unwarranted racial disparities in upper level classes, which can be observed in the Great Schools, Together report (2012) in which the school district lays out its goals for the next three years. The goal set around extending access to upper level classes for African American students is simply to remain within bounds, or racial fairness guidelines, which is +/- 15% of the representation of the school population. No adventurous markers were set for placement, which could eventually raise concerns and further

heightened mistrust about how much effort Unit 4 administrators will continue to make, moving forward, with addressing equity and excellence issues in education.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter I provided the local context for understanding Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement. Specifically, I detailed racial equity and race relations in the local area and events that led up to the establishment of a court-monitored equity consent decree in Unit 4. Further, I presented data that demonstrates the underrepresentation of African American students in upper level classes and discussed detracking and support strategies employed within Unit for to address the disparity. I closed this chapter with a discussion of current affairs and practices within the school district. In the next chapter, I present the data findings of the present study on Unit 4 high school students' attitudes toward academic placement.

CHAPTER 5

BLINDED BY THE TRACKS: A PRESENTATION OF THE DATA OUTCOMES

In this Chapter, I present a description of the results from the survey collected in spring 2009 and the findings from the individual interviews conducted in spring 2013. Data are presented separately by phases in order to observe the context in which each method was conducted: during or post-consent decree. Phase 1 results are presented first followed by the Phase 2 findings. A discussion of the data is presented in Chapter 6, as I wanted to value the participants' raw and authentic voice with limited personal critiques of their responses and comments. I create this space for students to "self-represent" as educational stakeholders. Data reflects not only students' attitudes toward academic placement, in general, but also their support, opposition, and/or resistance to equity reform efforts implemented in Unit 4 high schools to address the racial disparity between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes. The chapter also includes students' policy recommendations for increasing the enrollment of African Americans in upper level classes and interest in being involved in on-going equity efforts in Unit 4.

Phase 1 Results

Overview

In Phase 1 of the study, I relied on existing data from the Champaign Community Unit School District 4 2009 School Climate Study, which came to me in the form of responses to a high school survey, featuring seven demographic items, 75 closed-ended statements, and two open-ended questions. I used the demographic items, primarily race, three of the closed-ended statements and both of the open-ended questions, which were appropriate for addressing the research questions presented in my study on high school students' attitudes toward academic

placement. The demographic items asked students to indicate their gender, grade level, grades, number of years attending current school, race/ethnicity, lunch status, and honors/advanced placement (AP) enrollment status. In my initial analysis, I considered all of the demographic items. However, upon further clarification of my research questions and given the historical context of the consent decree, which serves as a backdrop for the climate survey and this study, in general, I decided to focus on race.

The closed-ended statements selected for analysis were: "I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in;" "The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students;" and "Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years." The two open-ended questions were: "Are there other things you would like the school system to know about diversity issues? If so, please write your comments here;" and, "If you have comments about diversity, please write your comments below." A total of 1,447 African American and White high school survey participants completed all three of the selected closed-ended statements, and 55 provided responses to one or both of the open-ended questions[25]. Overall results (when race is ignored) tended to look like the attitudes of Whites since there were more White students in the research sample than African Americans.[26]

In addition to measuring the frequency of responses to each of the closed-ended statements, at various stages of the analysis, data was disaggregated and analyzed by race to determine differences and significant relations. Results from a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) revealed a significant difference between race and the three closed-ended

[25] The original sample consisted of 1,800 high school participants. However, the sample was reduced to include only students who a) were enrolled at either Champaign Central High School or Centennial High School; b) completed all selected items; and c) self-identified, or were recoded as, African American or White.
[26] Refer to Chapter 3 for a complete demographic breakdown of the research sample.

statements (F=65; df=3, 1443; p = .000) (see Appendix F for full table). Results from a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) also revealed race had a significant difference on students' attitudes even when controlled for gender, grade level, grades, honors/AP enrollment status, lunch status, and school (F=34.97; df=3; 1437; p = .000) (see Appendix G for full table). I describe these results in more detail throughout this chapter.

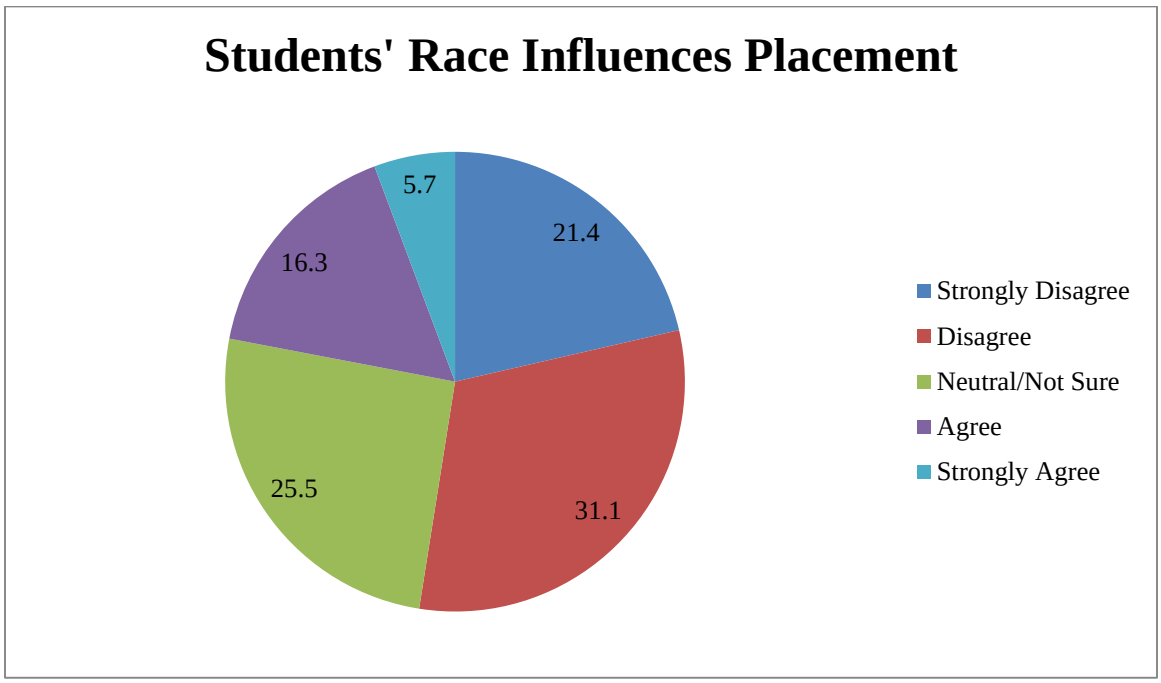
Responses to the open-ended questions were used to provide an interpretive context and to illustrate or help make sense of the numerical results. Taken together, the results from the closed-ended statements and the responses to the open-ended questions provide evidence for high school students' attitudes toward academic placement and begin to shed light on how to understand any differences in their attitudes.

I used the three closed-ended statements from the survey as subheadings to organize this chapter in order to manage the multiple sources of data and provide for easier comparison of data results across phases. Under each subheading, I present the frequency of responses to the statement, including a disaggregation by race, and relevant comments generated from the open-ended questions. Taken together, the different types of data help make sense of students' perceptions about a particular statement, and, more generally, their attitudes toward academic placement.

"I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in."

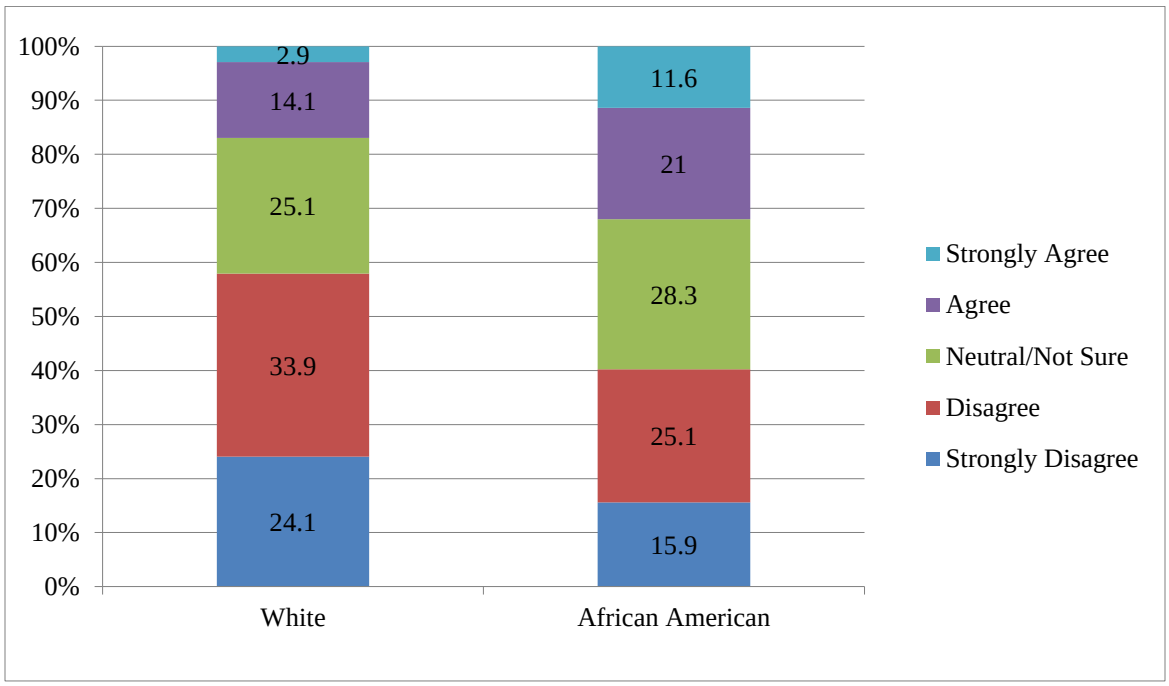
Results from the Champaign Unit 4 2009 School Climate Study High School Survey indicated that the majority (53%) of survey participants do not perceive race influences which classes they are placed. By contrast, 22% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that race does influence placement. See Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Students' Race Influences Placement



When examined by race, results revealed nearly 60% of Whites disagreed or strongly disagreed that race influences placement compared to 40% of African Americans who shared similar attitudes. See Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Students' race influences placement, by race



Univariate analysis, produced by a MANCOVA, revealed a significant difference between the mean scores for African Americans (M=2.87, SD=1.24) and Whites (M=2.37, SD=1.08), even when controlled for gender, grade level, grades, honors/AP enrollment status, lunch status, and school (F=40.09; df=1, 1439; p = .000) (see Appendix G for full table). On average, Whites expressed less agreement than African Americans that race influences placement.

Responses to the open-ended questions on the survey provide additional insight into whether students think the classes they are placed in are influenced by race. Thirty-four survey participants offered relevant comments. The majority of comments, N=20, suggested students do not think race influences which classes they are placed in. Seven of the comments not only reflected the students' position that placement decisions are based on the classes they choose during registration, but also insinuated that students are to be held responsible for any racial disparities that exist in placement. One African American female wrote, "I think that this is a

waste of time. People aren't in honors classes because they don't want to be. I think if everyone stopped making the biggest deal about the smallest things everyone would stop thinking every problem has to do with race." As previously mentioned, the consent decree served as the backdrop for the climate study survey; thus, it is reasonable to interpret the problem the student was referencing as the racial disparity that exists between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes. She considered it "a waste of time" for Unit 4 administrators to entertain the disparity as a serious race problem because she perceived students make their own placement decisions. Another student, White male, presented a similar thought but was more direct in stating the level of student responsibility in creating racial disparities in enrollment in upper level classes. He stated, "As to the disproportion of white and black students in honors classes, all students are given the option to what level of class they want to take. So technically it is our choice that racial placement is imbalanced. Black students have to want to be in an honors class." Other students shared similar sentiments that race does not influence placement because students get to choose their classes:

> *Students are placed in classes they sign up for them, so if certain races don't have a high number of races in honors classes it's because they aren't signing up for them not because of their race. (White male)*

> *I have plenty of advance classes, we pick our own classes so whatever class we are in that was by our choice. I think this was not very important at all. (African American female)*

> *All students are welcome to sign up for any class. I do not think it is a racism issue if African Americans are not in honors classes. We have the freedom to sign up for classes so they can sign up to. (White female)*

Aside from student choice, seven of the comments suggested students do not think race influences which classes they are placed in because placement decisions are based on students' qualifications. Academic talent, as measured through standardized test scores and grade

performance, and desired behaviors, such as work ethic and demonstrated effort, were the most cited qualifications reflected in students' comments. Comments imply that a student is deemed qualified for participation in upper level classes through 1) self-assessments of their academic talent and preferred behaviors, which then influences their class selections, and 2) assessments made by guidance counselors. One White male wrote, "Some people who are not as gifted and do not get placement in certain courses call it racism when it was just a teacher picking the more deserving person for a course of position." This comment is an example of a student who perceives placement decisions are based on an assessment of academic talent and that those who are not placed in the upper level classes are simply not qualified and are misguided in their interpretation of the occurrence of a racist incident. Other students offered similar comments about placement decisions being based on academic talent:

> *That is total crap, race doesn't play any part in class placement. If you are smart and up to it you can be in an AP class or honor class, there is nothing racist about it. (White male)*

> *Enrollment should be based on, and I feel is based on, grades and performance. Not the difference in race. No matter how wide the gap. (White female)*

In addition to academic talent, some comments suggested that an assessment of certain behaviors is performed and used in making class choices by students and placement decisions by guidance counselors. One White male wrote, "I believe that this difference between white and black has nothing to do with opportunities. It's b.s. This all has to do with work ethic and being lazy and expectations." This student expressed his opinion that African American students have the same opportunities as White students to enroll in upper level classes; thus, he perceives the racial difference in enrollment is the result of African American students not wanting to work hard and therefore choosing classes that do not require them to put in as much effort. Other

comments reflected a similar sentiment about the role of work ethic in class selections and placement decisions:

> *Our school system is definitely Not racist. There is nothing unfair about our school. If you work hard enough, you get into the AP and honors classes, if you don't, too bad. (White female)*

> *I think the reason there is such a difference between whites and blacks in honors is not due to race but effort. (White male)*

> *Teens get in trouble because they misbehave. And they use their race as an excuse. If they don't get into the honors classes, it's because they don't try hard enough. (Bi-racial White female)*

Seven of the comments reflected both choice and qualifications rationale to support the perception that students' race does not influence which classes they are placed in. For example, one African American female commented, "All students "Choose" which classes they take in high school. DUH…Smart children should be placed in honors." Other comments imitated a comparable response and rationale for the existence of the racial disparity in enrollment of African American and White students in upper level classes:

> *If there is less African Americans in AP or honors classes it is because they don't want to be in it or they are not smart enough to be in them. (White male)*

> *Students pick what classes they go into and if they don't have the test scores to be in upper level classes that's them. (White female)*

> *Students should be placed in classes based on their mind only, and it is often the students' decision. If there are not many black students in honors, that's the way it goes. (White female)*

Some comments, N=5, suggested students' race does appear to influence the classes they are placed in. These comments were not definitive and no additional context was provided. However, the comments do acknowledge racial disparities in honors and speak directly to the

racial make-up, or aesthetics, of some of their classes. One plausible interpretation of these comments is that some students believe that race appears to have a role in placement, whether explicitly or implicitly, given the racial make-up of the classes. Thus, I insert students' comments—notably mostly offered by African Americans—here to highlight their perceptions and experiences of racial disparities in some of their classes:

> *I do feel uncomfortable at times because of my race and it seems like I'm the only black student in my honor classes and that's how the tension starts. (African American female)*
>
> *That in honor classes there are not many blacks per classroom. (African American male)*
>
> *I'm the only black kid in all of my honors classes. (African American male)*
>
> *In all of my honors courses I am the only black male. (African American male)*
>
> *Honors classes have predominantly white students. Non-honors predominantly black. It shouldn't be that way. (White female)*

On the other hand, eight of the students' comments—notably all from White students—indicate that they perceive students' race does influence the classes in which they are placed, which they consider displeasing. Some of the comments suggested that students of color, particularly African American, are placed in the upper level classes in order to give the appearance of diversity. One White female stated, "I think kids of color are placed in honors classes because our school needs to look better with not all white students in honors classes. Not all colored students, just some." Another White female indicated, "I feel in my school there are students in honors classes that are just there to show some diversity. Some don't want to be there and/or get in trouble often. It really annoys me though when I'm taking class seriously and they goof off." Other comments suggest African American students are placed in upper level classes because of set racial quotas or goals to create racial balance. One White female expressed, "I am very disgusted with having to meet numbers in honors classes. This requires schools to place

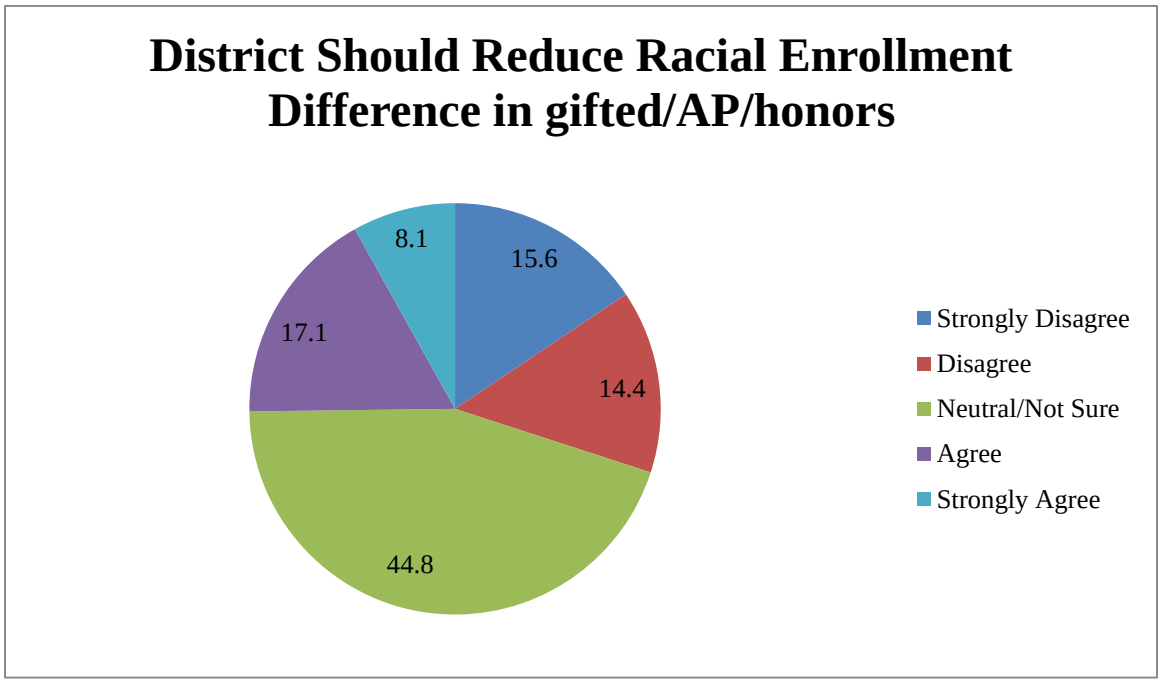
students who don't belong into these gifted classes, which causes disciplinary issues and tension in the classroom." Another student, White male, commented, "There are some people in my honor classes that do not deserve to be there. I think people should be put into those classes by how hard they work and their grades, not just because of their race and so they balance the class."

Overall, the majority of participants' responses indicated that they do not perceive students' race influences which classes they are placed in. However, comment data were more likely to reflect that race does have influence in placement.

"The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students."

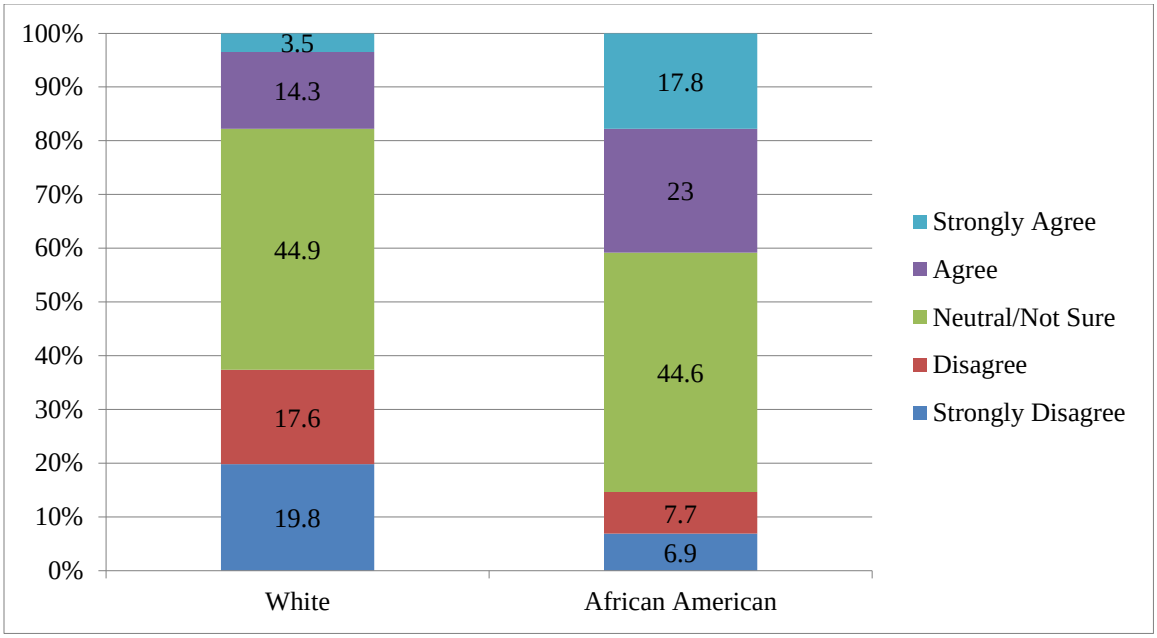
Results revealed that the majority of participants (44.8%) were neutral/not sure whether Unit 4 administrators should implement efforts to reduce the enrollment difference between African American and White students in upper level classes. Approximately 30% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that Unit 4 should reduce the enrollment difference while 25% agreed or strongly agreed. See Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 The District should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students in gifted/AP/honors



When examined by race, results revealed approximately 40% of African Americans agreed or strongly agreed that Unit 4 should reduce the racial difference in enrollment compared to 18% of Whites who shared similar sentiments. On the contrary, 37% of Whites disagreed or strongly disagreed compared to only 15% of African Americans who felt similarly. See Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 District should reduce gifted and talented enrollment differences, by race



Univariate analysis revealed a significant difference between the mean scores for African Americans (M = 3.37, SD = 1.08) and Whites (M=2.64, SD=1.06), even when controlled for gender, grade level, grades, honors/AP enrollment status, lunch status, and school (F=70.84; df=1, 1439; p = .000) (see Appendix G for full table). On average, Whites expressed less agreement than African Americans that Unit 4 should reduce the enrollment difference between African American and White students in upper level classes.

Seventeen survey participants offered relevant comments. Given the 2009 climate study was conducted at the end of the consent decree, most of Unit 4's efforts to increase the representation of African American students in honors and AP had already been implemented. Thus, some of the students' comments reflect their attitudes towards actual or perceived efforts instituted within the school district, while others, whose comments did not necessarily imply their awareness about the different efforts, offered their general opinions about the role of district level involvement in addressing racial disparities in academic placement.

All of the relevant comments implied that participants are opposed to Unit 4 administrators addressing the racial disparity in upper level classes. A couple students thought it was an outright stupid or worthless idea for the school district to get involved:

> *Forcing…gifted programs to be equal based on race is stupid. (White male)*

> *…[P]utting kids into higher class because of their race or taking them out of one because of their race is the most worthless idea I have ever heard. (White female)*

Other students expressed frustration with Unit 4's involvement—actual, perceived, or hypothetical—in addressing the racial disparities in upper level classes as well as noted factors that they thought were more important in making placement decisions. One White male commented, "Honors gifted students should be where they are because of the grades they have achieved throughout elementary and middle school, not because the district needs to make a quota of a certain amount of students from a certain race/ethnicity." Another student, White female, offered, "You will never make the schools racially equal. African Americans, or any other race can't just be moved into an upper level class to fill a race quota, especially if they can't handle the level/pace of the class. Schools need to judge based on grades…" These comments implied students perceived efforts implemented within Unit 4 to address the racial disparities in upper level classes meant traditional criteria used for placement decisions, such as standardized test scores, grade performance, and desired behaviors, were relaxed in order to increase the representation of African American students. Several comments expressed similar sentiments and noted the approach to addressing the racial disparities in placement was shortsighted:

> *You can't put people in an AP or honors class based on their race, it needs to be because of academic progress. Also, counselors need to stop putting unaccelerated students in accelerated classes, which holds other students back… (White male)*

> *I think when it comes to honors classes, it shouldn't be about race. It should be if you are intelligent enough to be in the class. If that means there is more of one race than the*

other so be it. Evening out the races doesn't help those who should be in. (Bi-racial African American female)

If the school system puts more Black kids in gifted classrooms 'because they are Black' (but they didn't score high enough on the test) - they are just changing the look of things. Messing it up. (White female)

Students shouldn't be in honors class if they don't have the grades for it, regardless of race. (White female)

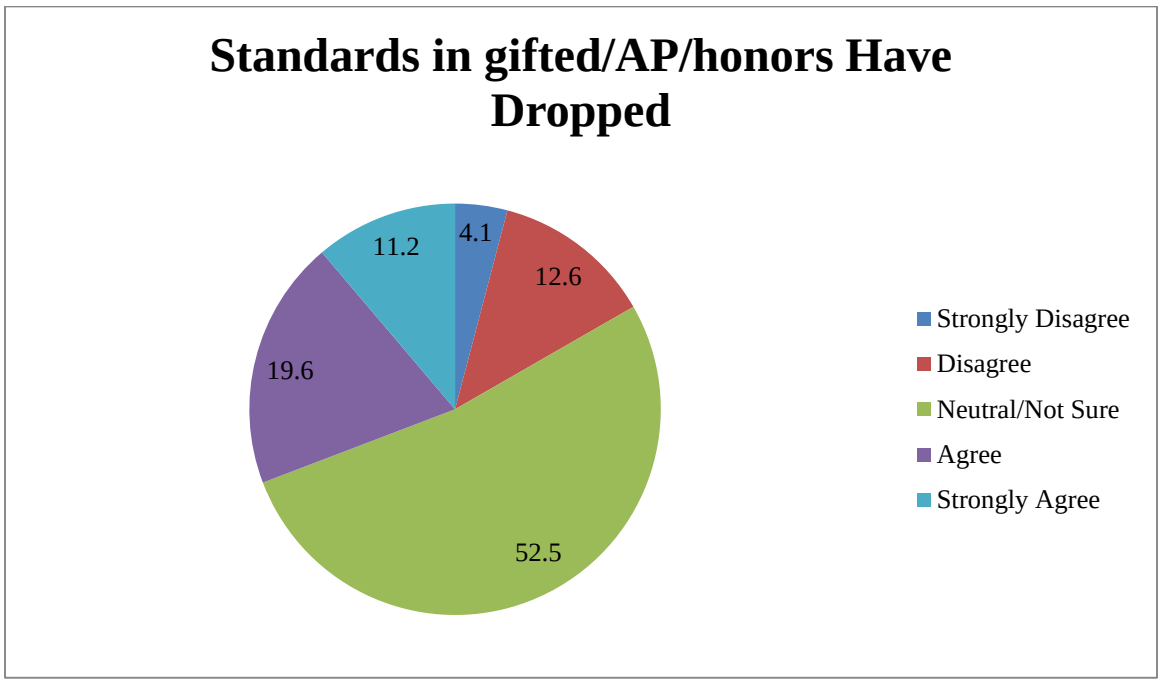
Class placement should be soley determined by intelligence/potential. If the Black to White ratio in AP classes is uneven, then Blacks should be encouraged to do better instead of being placed in a class just so the school's numbers look good. (White female)

Although the majority of responses indicated students were neutral or not sure if the school district should reduce the racial enrollment difference in upper level classes, students' comments reflected opposition to Unit 4's involvement. Several comments explicitly or implicitly stated the school district administrators should not implement measures that would relax the traditional criteria used in making placement decisions.

"Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years."

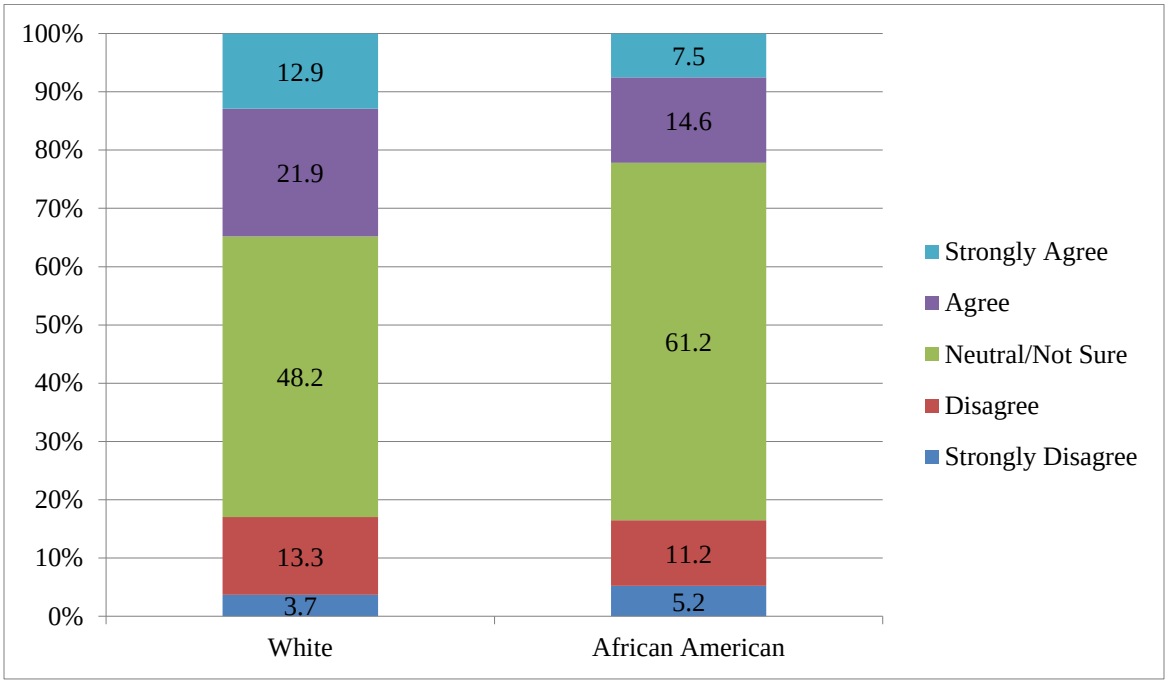
When participants were asked if they perceive "standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years," the majority of students (52.5%) responded they were neutral or not sure. Approximately 31% of participants perceived standards have dropped, while nearly 17% do not perceive a drop. See Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 Standards in gifted/AP/honors have dropped in recent years



Similarly, when disaggregated by race, the majority of African American (61%) and White (48%) students responded they were neutral or not sure if standards have dropped." Yet, Whites (35%) were more likely to agree that standards have dropped than were African Americans (22%). See Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Standards in gifted/AP/honors have dropped in recent years, by race



Univariate analysis revealed a significant difference between the mean scores for African Americans (M=3.08, SD=0.87) and Whites (M = 3.27, SD = 0.97), even when controlled for gender, grade level, grades, honors/AP enrollment status, lunch status, and school (F=8.64; df=1, 1439; p = .003) (see Appendix G for full table). On average, African Americans were less likely than Whites to agree that standards in upper level classes have dropped in recent years.

Eight survey participants offered relevant comments. I present the comments in this section with caution. It is not clear whether students have evidence, or markers, for determining if standards have actually dropped. Since the data used here are stand-alone comments, I offer four scenarios as possible contexts for making sense of students' comments about standards in the upper level classes:

1) As previously mentioned in Chapters 1, 2 and 4, there's a general perception among opponents of detracking reform, including students, that increasing the representation of

African American students in upper level classes through focused efforts, monitored by the Court, results in, or increases the possibility for lowered academic standards.

2) Students can measure if standards in honors have lowered by comparing the expectations around upper level classes, such as challenging curriculum and fast paced instruction, with their actual experience.
3) Students can compare their experience, or a peer's experience, in an academic level class to a similar class taught at the advanced level.
4) Students can determine if standards have dropped based on the progressive levels of difficulty of exams and amount of material covered and/or repeated while enrolled in a class currently in progress.

Comments suggest students perceive a) standards have been lowered or b) the possibility for standards to be lowered is more likely to occur if "unqualified" students are placed in upper level classes. One White female student responded, "The whole thing about everyone being treated equal is changing when people decide to make hard classes easier to let other races equally into classes. Everyone who belongs in the hard classes should be there." Another student, White female, shared a similar sentiment, "Minorities are favored because of the consent decree. The standards for honors classes have been lowered in order to include minorities." These comments reflect a sentiment that when efforts are implemented to increase the representation of African American students in the upper level classes, the advanced classes are subsequently made easier in order to accommodate, or favor, the African American students. A couple students, both White males, not only indicated that they perceived standards were dropping, or had already dropped, but also urged their guidance counselors to stop placing students, who they perceived are unprepared for advance curriculums, in upper level classes:

[C]ounselors need to stop putting unaccelerated students in accelerated classes, which holds other students back… (White male)

Kids should not be put in accelerated classes if they can't handle it no matter what race. I learned the same math in 5th grade that I did in 8th grade because of the school slowing down for people being forced into the accelerated classes. (White male)

Although the majority of participants' responses suggested students are neutral or not sure if standards in upper level classes have dropped, comments, though few in number, provide some insight into how students are thinking about standards in their classes in relation to equity efforts implemented in Unit 4 high schools to address racial disparities in the placement of African American students in upper level classes.

The climate study survey produced a wealth of data significant for better understanding students' attitudes toward academic placement in general, and more specifically, racial disparities in upper level classes, such as honors and AP, and the equity efforts put forth to address them. However, the results of the three selected closed-ended statements, of which the majority of responses for two of the statements were neutral/not sure, and the identified relevant comments (N=55 or 3.8% of my study sample) are not sufficient for generating in depth responses to my research questions. Additionally, the survey data is not sufficient for providing an in depth analysis of differences in students' attitudes toward academic placement by race. Thus, a second phase was added to the study and more data was collected, in the form of individual student interviews, to complement the survey data, and offer better understandings of students' attitudes toward placement and efforts to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in upper level classes. Phase 2 findings are presented in the next section.

Phase 2 Findings

Overview

In Phase 2 of the study, I conducted and analyzed thirteen semi-structured interviews with high school students from Unit 4. Interviews were conducted in the spring of 2013 at the participants' high school during regular school hours over the span of three consecutive school days. Interviews ranged from about 25-60 minutes each; each participant was interviewed once. I was given a very narrow time frame to enter and exit the school due to scheduling conflicts and an administrative desire to not disrupt their normal school routines and operations. Nonetheless, the overall experience of working with the administrators of the school and the participants was very positive and meaningful.

Participants were selected through a maximal variation sampling strategy in order to enhance the opportunity for a greater diversity of perspectives on students' attitudes toward academic placement (see Chapter 3 for details of the selection process). Participants' backgrounds are discussed in Chapter 3. Participants were each asked the same set of pre-determined questions from an interview protocol (See Appendix E), but follow-up questions varied. Sample questions included: "Do you think the academic placement process is fair, in general, and as you see it played out at your respective school?" "What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having an academic placement structure in schools?" and "African American students are underrepresented in upper level classes; why do you think they are underrepresented?"

I also asked participants to respond to the three closed-ended statements featured on the 2009 climate study survey used in Phase 1 of the study: "I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in;" "The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and

talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students;" and "Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years." Throughout the study, I became increasingly interested in drawing comparisons of responses across phases given both sets of data were collected under different contexts: during and post-consent decree. I anticipated that participant responses and reactions to my questions and statements would reflect the tenor of the conversations and attitudes toward academic placement during the given context.

Interview transcripts were analyzed by hand. I reread each transcript, while simultaneously listening to the corresponding audio file, to identify codes. Codes were then organized into categories. Following, codes were reduced to diminish overlap and redundancy. Frequency of codes is reported throughout this section under each subheading, or statement. Similar to Phase 1, I used the three closed-ended statements from the survey and the interview protocol as subheadings in order to manage the massive amount of interview data and provide for easier comparison of data results across both phases. In addition to reporting the frequency of codes, under each subheading, I utilize participants' responses to other pre-determined and follow-up questions to further illustrate and generate better understandings of the statements, and more generally high school students' attitudes toward academic placement in Unit 4. I am deliberate in bringing attention to not only the most frequent responses, but also to those that I perceived were quite unconventional or unexpected to hear from students.

In each of the interviews I briefly mentioned the 2009 climate study survey, of which a few of the participants had taken as middle school students, and indicated my interest in having them respond to the three statements from the survey as well as other predetermined and follow-up questions. I did not recite from a scripted overview of the climate study survey. I simply acknowledged that a climate study survey was administered in 2000 and again in 2009, and the

purpose of the survey was to gauge the temperature of the school and district climate by having students, staff, and parents respond to a series of questions around fairness in hiring practices, academic placement, discipline among other topics.

Additionally, I provided participants with a very brief overview of the history, contents, and goals of the consent decree, particularly because most of the students either were not aware or had forgotten. I did not have a script. However, the following excerpt from my interview with Adam is an example of a typical overview I gave participants about the consent decree:

Ivory: Are you familiar with the consent decree? Ever heard of the language?

Adam: Yes, but I don't know what it is. Isn't that the thing that … isn't it a Champaign-specific?

Ivory: Yes.

Adam: … and that happened nine years ago or something?

Ivory: It happened between 2000 and 2009.

Adam: Yes, yes, I do. I remember hearing about some court case or something.

Ivory: Yes.

Adam: I don't remember what it is exactly.

Ivory: In some very, very like quick rough language. A group of African-American parents from the community, they filed a complaint against the school district indicating that schools were either perpetuating or creating racial disparities amongst African-American students and White students in various structures whether it was in teacher hiring, student discipline, and also academic placement, just to name three. In particular, with academic placement, there was this notion that African-American students were being filtered into regular classes and they were not being extended opportunities to participate in other classes like Honors and AP.

> *Over the course of a decade, working with the school administrators, the school implemented several new policies to try to eliminate unwarranted racial disparity, not they eliminate the gap altogether but just to eliminate unwarranted ones to make sure that the system itself wasn't necessarily perpetuating this division, okay?*

Interview findings are presented in the remainder of this chapter.

"I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in"

Participants' responses were quite mixed and nearly evenly split between "Yes" and "No" when asked if students' race influences placement. Only three participants responded with a definitive "Yes" to the statement, while seven offered a definitive "No."

Malcolm, an African American male who enrolled in mostly honors classes, was one of the more vocal "Yes" participants. He expressed: "Of course because in order for the consent decree…to be lifted, they had to show that African Americans were in these classes. Am I correct? So without these numbers, again, there cannot be a consent decree. That's what the community was outraged about… why aren't our kids in these classes?" Malcolm's awareness of the consent decree contributed immensely to how he thought about issues around academic placement. He perceived that school administrators take students' race into consideration when making placement assignments, particularly in upper level classes, in order to achieve racial balance in the classes. In many ways, his comments resembled those expressed in the Phase 1 findings that Unit 4 administrators are playing a "numbers game," in which students are placed into classes to fill, as some of the survey participants suggested, "quotas" to balance out the racial representation in classes. Most of the other interview participants did not have the same level of awareness about the consent decree as Malcolm. In fact, when I asked each participant quite explicitly, "Are you familiar with the consent decree," the overwhelming majority of them said "No" and only a couple indicated that they vaguely remembered it. At first I thought this

was quite remarkable given Unit 4 is only four years removed from the consent decree, but then I realized that several of the interview participants transplanted into the school district towards the end or just after the termination of the consent decree in summer 2009.

Some of the less definitive "Yes" responses resembled those of Adilia, an African American female, and Penelope, a White female, both of whom are enrolled in mostly honors classes. Adilia acknowledged quite nonchalantly, "It seems that way sometimes," without offering any additional words to support her statement. Penelope, on the other hand, was quite expressive. She stated: "I think to a certain level, it is…I don't think that a lot of African American people are put in AP classes and if they suggest they want to be in the AP classes, I think people are like are you sure? They're not like…it's not a snap to it like yeah. I think that if they do that to one student, they're going to, I mean like, they're doing it to like a ton of students…" Penelope's response suggested her belief that school administrators might steer African American students away from some of the upper level classes such as AP.

One participant, Elle, a White female who enrolled in mostly AP classes, changed her response in mid-thought. She stated:

> Just basing it off the color of their skin, no. I don't think so. I think if the student was eligible to be in a class, then I think they would be placed in that class if they wanted to. Then again, I know I don't always have a good perspective on that because of my race. I think that I never actually get to see the other side of maybe how they're treated because of their background like their cultural…because of racial background. Maybe yeah, I think that it probably does influence because I think that…"I'm trying to phrase this well." I think that sometimes where we come from influences how important we approach things…

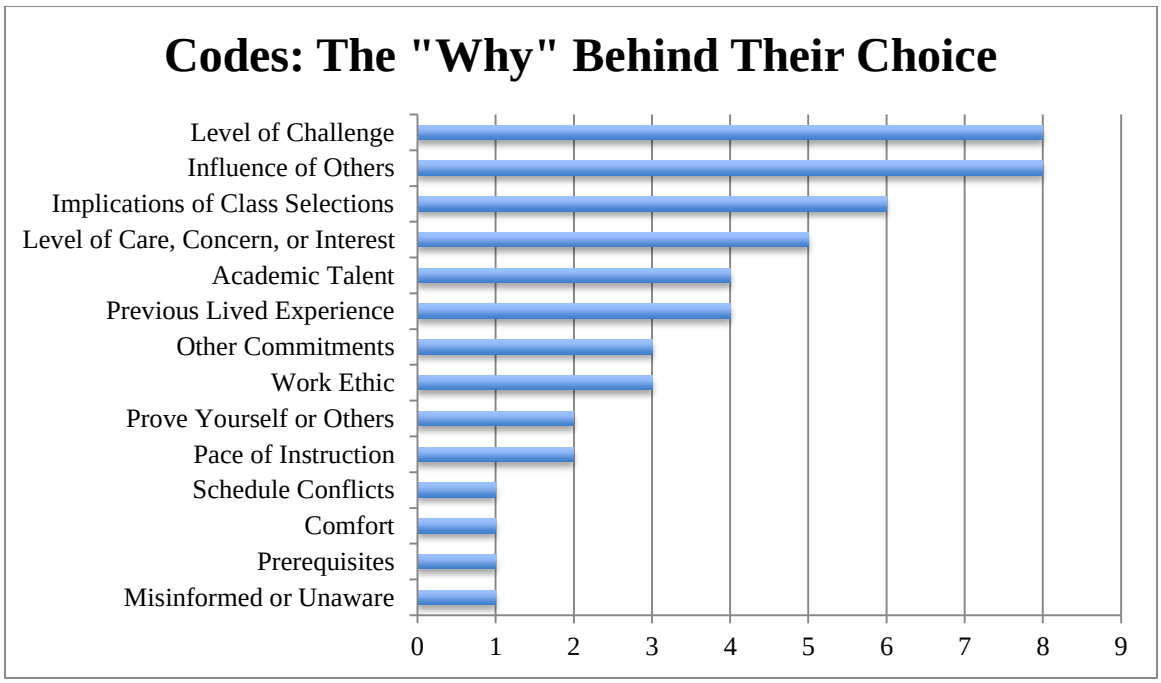
After providing an immediate response, she expressed doubt in her comments as she acknowledged and wrestled with her racial and class privilege—as she did quite frequently throughout the interview—to consider how she would respond to the same statement I asked her

but from a different perspective. In this case, she tried to imagine how students of color would respond to this statement given their histories and experiences of school and societal discrimination. As reflected in her response, she came to accept the possibility that students who may be, as she stated, "eligible," to be in certain classes may not get placed in them because of their racial background.

Although some interview participants perceived students' race influences placement, several responses to the presented statement were in the negative. Participants indicated they get to choose their classes. For example, Brady, a White male who enrolled in mostly AP classes, stated, "I mean, I would…I think if we talk about like…I don't think it matters at all because I think it's random. It just matters of who signed up for what class…Yeah, I chose to take these honors classes, whereas I could have chosen this year just to take all regular classes and I don't think…so I don't think it matters at all what my race was." Vanessa, a White female who enrolled in mostly academic classes, shared a similar sentiment as Brady. She contributed, "I don't really think that. I think that a lot of them just choose what classes they want to be in and they get in it…they choose their classes and then the system just filters it out however." I interpret Vanessa's comment to imply that the academic placement process entails more than just students selecting which classes they are interested in taking; other factors, such as teacher and counselor assessments, are incorporated into the process. As described in Chapter 4, in the District, students choose the classes they are interested in during registration; however, the guidance counselors, who review teachers' recommendations and assess students' academic records, make placement decisions. Parents may override placement decisions by the counselors through petition.

Student choice also surfaced as a major theme from the comments students provided to the open-ended survey questions in Phase 1 of the study. However, I was not able to make much of the comments from the survey data beyond participants' perceived choice, and not race, influences their class placements given the survey construction. The use of individual, semi-structured interviews in Phase 2 of the study, however, allowed me to explore the relationship between student choice and academic placement in more depth. Particularly, I chose to focus on what participants perceived influences their choices for class placements. Through our conversations on student choice, their explanations for the nature of the racial enrollment difference between African American and White students in upper level classes emerged. Participants offered a wide range of considerations and people capable of influencing their choices and inadvertently contributing to the racial enrollment gap in upper level classes. The most highly cited influences for student choice included, in no particular order, the level of difficulty of a class; potential implications of class selections, such as impact on GPA and college readiness; and parents, siblings, peers, teachers and counselors, as illustrated in Figure 5.7. Some participants discussed what influences their personal choices, while others spoke more directly to why some African American students may opt not to enroll in upper level classes—a conversation we first had while discussing the consent decree.

Figure 5.7 Codes: The "Why" Behind Participants' Choices for Class Selections



Note: The numbers on the x-axis reflect the number of participants who mentioned that particular code at least once

Carlton, an African American male who enrolled in mostly AP classes, directed his comments toward the racial enrollment difference in upper level classes. He indicated: "I think it exists because people kind of…well students kind of want to take that nice chill class that they can kind of like be, 'I don't care,' and still get by with that good A." Brady also suggested the level of challenge might influence students' choices for class placement in addition to work ethic and academic talent. He contributed:

> They just don't have like the work ethic or they just aren't smart enough. They haven't grown up to take hard classes and just…they just don't have it, like…They just don't have…I don't know…It's like…They just have a…They don't want to challenge themselves.

These attitudes coincide with a response provided by Marcus, an African American male who enrolled in mostly academic classes. He stated, "I just like, I don't know I just like being in the classes because they're easy." Chardonnay, an African American female who enrolled in mostly

honors classes, however, provided a counter-narrative to Carlton and Brady's notion that African American students do not want to challenge themselves by taking more advanced classes. She stated:

> I wanted to challenge myself. When I came here, I noticed that it wasn't really a lot of African American students in those classes. I figured if these other kids, if they can do it, why can't I do it? I signed up for them…I do it to prove myself that inside of me saying that I can do this. It's just to challenge myself. To see what I can do, what my strengths are and weaknesses if I can do this.

Chardonnay chose honors classes to prove to herself that she could handle the challenge. In many ways she considered doing so as "walking into an uncomfortable space" knowing that she would be only one of few African American students who would be in some of her classes and not really having an idea of what to expect.

Several participants highlighted some of the implications of class selections for college preparation as influencing their choices for class placements. Malcolm stated: "I understand that regular classes won't prepare me for college…the rigor is different. They tell you that it's not what you do but what's offered in your school. Colleges look for the types of classes that you take. The more rigorous the class, the more better it is." Elle expressed a similar sentiment. She responded:

> Because honestly, I wouldn't take higher classes if I didn't think it was going to get me into college. I would have breezed my way through high school, but because I understood how important college was I knew that I wanted to take higher classes.

Brady also indicated aspirations of going to college as influencing his decisions, but he also noted how some students might not take the more challenging classes in order to protect their GPAs:

> Well, I mean, that would…there's sort of circumstances where I think some people don't even have college on their minds. Some people do and they're scared to get a B or they're scared to get a C, because I know people who have like one AP class, but they definitely

> should be in more but they're scared to get a B because they've been making straight A's all through high school.

Participants underscored how students negotiate taking the upper level classes and maintaining strong, competitive GPAs. This negotiation is important because they have to contend with what colleges really want in a prospective student: a student who has a strong GPA and high class rank, or a student who has taken more challenging classes. As a former admissions counselor, the truth is colleges want to see both. Nonetheless, some students would rather protect their GPA than pursue more challenging classes even though, as described in the Unit 4 curriculum handbook, upper level classes often have different scales for GPA to account for the level of difficulty.

The influence of others, such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers and counselors, was another major theme that emerged from participants' discussion about what influences their choices of classes. Grant, an African American male who enrolled in mostly honors classes, stated: "They [African American students enrolled in mostly academic classes] like pick a class, depending on what other…their friends are taking and they are getting in the same class as them." Adam, a White male who enrolled in mostly honors classes, also highlighted the influence of peers on class selections:

> I feel like a lot of them it's peer pressure. Their friends are going to think they're…It was like cool and stuff that they're in AP classes, so they don't want to do that and part of it…I mean it's one of the big part and then other than that, I really don't know why. I don't see they're was any less intelligent as anyone else.

Grant suggested some students are willing to forgo an upper level class to be in classes with their friends, while Adam noted that students might not choose an upper level class because of how they might be perceived by their friends. Mikey, a White male who enrolled in mostly academic classes, on the other hand, indicated that his parents heavily influence his decisions about class

selections. He stated: "I hate to say this, but I think my parents are holding me back. I'm not holding myself back. Believe me, I want to go up to those higher-level courses." He was interested in taking upper level classes but his parents did not think he could manage the workload associated with the upper level classes. Similar to Mikey, Adilia considers her mom as being a major influence in her class selections as well. However, unlike Mikey's parents, Adilia's mom encourages her to take the more advanced classes. She commented, "My mom she is always like you can do anything you want in the world, you are smart. She is always saying things like that and I am not sure if like parents told them [African American students enrolled in academic classes] things like that."

Chico, a multiracial-African American male who enrolled in mostly academic classes, offered a different rationale for why he perceives students' race influences which classes they are placed in. Other participants who perceived students' race influences placement typically referenced or implied the school administration considers race when making placement decisions; however, Chico said he considers race when choosing his preferences for classes. As mentioned previously, choice was usually named as the main reason why race does not influence placement. Similar to Mikey and Adilia, Chico considered the influence of others as having the most influence on what classes he chooses to enroll in. But, unlike Mikey and Adilia, he noted peers and teachers, rather than parents, as his influencers. Through our conversation, he inadvertently made an argument for how race influences choice, which then influences placement. Thus, I will include a significant number of excerpts from his interview to demonstrate how he makes race-based class choices.

Chico's dislike of upper level classes began in middle school:

> I wouldn't do accelerated classes because, it was like, most of the kids in those accelerated classes, they know it alls. Those were the worst people to be in class with.

> Those be the kids that correct the teacher and you never get through a lesson. They're sitting there like, "that's not correct." OK, just let her make the mistake bro…I hate know it alls…most of those kids are stuck up.

His perception and experience of students who take the upper level classes carried over to high school:

> Most of the kids in accelerated classes here are usually rich kids…All you got to do is walk in the class. Most of the kids are preppie and white. Then if you walk into a regular class, you're going to see one or two rich kids but those rich kids act like us. So they'd rather be where they're most comfortable at than in an accelerated class where they're not…And then the ones that are like us that are in an accelerated class, they're there to prove a point, like, "hey, you're not the only ones who can do this. We can, too"…because nine out of ten chances, that kid in that class is not going to talk to most of those students. Maybe one or two.

I noticed Chico was very passionate about this conversation, so I decided to push him further by asking, "If I were to recommend you go to one of the upper level classes, like AP, would you go?" He stated:

> That would depend on what classes they are. Well, first, I have to be interested enough in the class to go into class. In other words, you're not even going to see me there. The teaching style, what the class is, what we cover, and what I can get out of the class.

I was really intrigued by his comments, so I asked him, "do you think other students share similar sentiments as you on this matter and does this help to explain why some African American students, in particular, may not choose an upper level class placement?" He responded: "It's not interesting enough for them to be in there. Or to use their time to take that class, yeah. There's a lot of kids like that…They'd rather be somewhere they're comfortable. Because they know they'll be judged." I decided to ask Chico, directly, "do you think students' race influences which classes they are placed?" He stated:

> Yeah…Well, like, for instance here, you look at it math teacher wise; Mr. Roger (pseudonym), he's white. He's a good math teacher. Most black kids don't go there. You got Ms. Smith (pseudonym) and Ms. Wilson (pseudonym). Ms. Wilson is black. Ms.

> Smith is white, but she acts black. Most kids, black kids or Caucasians that act like us, are either in Ms. Smith or Ms. Wilson. One, because they can connect with them, because they act like us outside of school, but then they actually help you to try to achieve.

Chico's responses conveyed that some students take their own race and culture into consideration when they choose their classes. This perspective, as previously mentioned, is quite different from some of the other participants who suggested that it was the school administrators who made placement decisions that took race into account. Thus, although the majority of students may disagree that race influences choice, students like Chico provide a counternarrative to demonstrate how race actually might influence choice, which then ultimately influences placement, as some of the other participants have suggested.

"The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students"

Interview participants were also asked to respond to a second statement taken from the 2009 climate study survey: the school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students. I clarified for participants that even though the statement uses the language "gifted and talented," which is typically reserved for elementary school children, I was interested in differences in honors and AP enrollment at the high school level. I also contextualized the statement for participants in order to establish the impetus for the question. I referenced findings from the 1998 district-wide equity audit, the monitoring reports, and other data that revealed a racial enrollment difference between African American and White students during the consent decree period. Afterwards, I would ask the participants: "given the information about the disparities I referenced, do you think the district should reduce the disparities in honors and AP enrollment that exists between African American and White students?" I also gave participants the flexibility to consider their current

school context so they would not feel obligated to reflect on a past, about which they had previously acknowledged they were unaware.

I did not have any current racial enrollment by class placement data to discuss with participants in order to provide them with a more up to date context to reflect upon before responding to my statement. To make the statement more relevant and current, I first asked participants to describe the diversity of their classes and how they differed across placement levels. At least perceptually, participants acknowledged that there are current racial disparities across the levels. Participants' comments about the racial diversity of the different curriculum levels were quite similar; the AP classes are largely White, the academic classes are overwhelming African American, and the honors classes are the most diverse of the three, but are still majority white. Participants offered some of the following comments when describing the racial diversity of AP:

> *Penelope: It's mostly white kids.*
>
> *Carlton: It's mostly Caucasian, so mostly white males and females. There are a few blacks in my history class and there are a few Asians. My math class I am the only African American.*
>
> *Elle: Probably, majority white. In my AP Spanish class, there are Latino students. There's one I'm pretty sure and…There are definitely African Americans in my classes, and probably at least two in every single AP class I take.*
>
> *Brady: [In AP Biology] A lot of them are Asian-American. Half. Yeah, and then there's one African American girl. [In AP Calculus] There's…I'm trying to think…[later in the interview]…I think, it's a lot of…there is a…a Latino girl in my AP English class.*

Comments used to describe the racial diversity of academic classes included:

> *Marcus: It's mostly black kids.*
>
> *Adam: That's vastly Black and Latinos.*

Chico: It was probably maybe three white kids and two of those white kids acted like us.

Participants perceived more diversity in the honors classes, but it depended on which honors class. As suggested by Grant, the largest concentrations of African American students in honors are enrolled in English and History. Thus, he stated, "there's a mixture" of African American and White students in his classes, but "there's a lot of…it's like white people are in more classes." Adam described the racial diversity of his Calculus class, which is also considered honors. He commented: "There's a little more diversity. There's no…I don't think there's any black people and a couple Latino. It's almost all white people in our class." Chardonnay described her honors classes in general, noting: "Mostly they are Caucasian people. It can be only like…I know in most of my classes is only about maybe three, yes, three African Americans, including me."

After the participants revealed racial disparities in some of their current classes, I restated the original statement from the survey, or a variation of the statement in the form of a question, "Is the racial gap that exists between African American and White students in upper level classes a problem that warrants a response from the District." Typically, participants' responses reflected both the original statement and the question.

Three participants suggested Unit 4 administrators should not get involved in reducing the racial enrollment gap. Carlton's response to the question, "Is the racial gap that exists between African American and White students in upper level classes a problem that warrants a response from the District," is an example of why some students perceive Unit 4 should not have to address the racial enrollment gap in upper level classes. He stated:

> I honestly don't feel like it's a problem at all…People know what they're signing up for and they kind of know, if they're on the academic track for two years, they know what they're going to get. If they sign up for these classes they kind of know. Well, I know what I'm signing up for. This what I've been doing and I like where I am. If they're

> going to force people to kind of go up into the classes they aren't ready for, it could have a bad outcome for that student and possibly harm them for their future. That shouldn't be a problem. That's not a problem in my book.

Carlton attributed the racial enrollment gap in upper level classes to student choice; thus, he did not think it was necessary for Unit 4 to be held responsible for addressing it. Adam not only indicated the gap should not be treated as a serious problem, he insisted, for Unit 4 to get involved in fixing the gap was "actually in itself…racist." He further stated, "I think it's the same thing with companies and needing to meet certain quotas, whatever for different racial diversities or gender. I think it's racist or sexist if you do that." He continued:

> I mean, it really should be whoever is the most qualified for that job should get the job regardless. I really don't think the race or the gender should matter, only if you have a bunch of women or a bunch of black people or Latinos or whoever that are most qualified for the job and they should get it. I think it's the same with classes. If you have people … if you have a bunch of black people that are prepared for the class and can succeed in it, then I think they should be in. I think this district and … I don't know how that works, but … I don't know.

In many ways, Adam criticized Unit 4's efforts to, as he stated, "lessen the gap" by adding "certain black students," to those who oppose affirmative action, citing upper level classes should be reserved for the "most qualified" students.

Nonetheless, the majority of participants (N=10) affirmed the school district should reduce the racial gap that exists between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes; participants offered varying reasons. Some of them responded "Yes" because they perceived the school administrators as the architects of the racial enrollment gap, while others suggested student choice explains the gap; but, unlike Carlton, they maintained Unit 4 still had some responsibility in addressing it as a problem. Malcolm, as previously noted, perceived the school administrators take students' race into consideration when making placement decisions; thus, he suggests it is the school administrators' responsibility to address the problem they

created. He responded, "They have to be accountable because it's under their rule." Adilia, Elle, and Marcus agreed Unit 4 should address the problem, but they also acknowledged in their comments that they do not think the school administrators are at fault:

> *Adilia: I don't know how you really could fix it. I mean I don't know how the school district would fix it. I think it is something the school probably has to.*
>
> *Elle: I don't think it was created on purpose, but I think that the school could get involved to fix it.*
>
> *Marcus: They should, but it's not really their fault because it's the student choice…*

Penelope, who also agreed that Unit 4 should address the racial enrollment gap, was one of the only participants to acknowledge the political ramifications of the school district getting involved. She stated: "I think that they should address it. But at the same time it's really sticky to address it because if you do address it, then it's like you're saying, yeah. It's there." Penelope's comment suggests if Unit 4 implements efforts to reduce the racial enrollment gap, then not only were they in agreement with the persons who perceived the racial disparity in upper level class enrollment as a problem that warranted a response, but they were also putting themselves at risk of being considered to be at fault for creating the gap.

"Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years."

Results from the 2009 climate study, as presented in Phase 1 of this study, revealed some students perceived standards in the upper level classes had dropped as a result of the efforts implemented within Unit 4 to reduce the racial enrollment difference. However, it was unclear whether students had an actual marker for determining if standards had in fact dropped. Earlier in this chapter, I presented four scenarios as possible contexts for making sense of students' comments about standards in the upper level classes. I offer these same context scenarios to help understand interview participants' responses about academic standards:

1) As previously mentioned in Chapters 1, 2 and 4, there's a general perception among opponents of detracking reform, including students, that increasing the representation of African American students in upper level classes through focused efforts, monitored by the Court, results in, or increases the possibility for lowered academic standards.
2) Students can measure if standards in honors/AP have lowered by comparing the expectations around upper level classes, such as challenging curriculum and fast paced instruction, with their actual experience.
3) Students can compare their experience, or a peer's experience, in an academic level class to a similar class taught at the advanced level. In the District, all high school core classes, such as U.S. Modern History, are required for graduation but are not taught at the advanced levels. Thus, some students can compare the standards and expectations for their upper level classes to the academic classes.
4) Students can determine if standards have dropped based on the progressive levels of difficulty of exams and amount of material covered and/or repeated while enrolled in a class currently in progress.

The majority of participants (N=7) responded "No" when asked if standards have dropped in their classes.

Carlton commented on the standards in his AP classes:

> I wouldn't say so, because AP classes are AP classes. Like I said before, the teachers, they're getting to that end of the book regardless if you're there or not. Maybe their standards have seen how the students are getting this way as the years go on so I have to change my approach. But their goal is to get to that end of the book, that chapter 40 so they're ready for that AP exam.

Elle shared similar sentiments about the AP classes stating, "I don't think it has. I think standards have risen." Notably, participants who were enrolled in mostly AP classes were consistent in

message that the standards in AP have not lowered. On the other hand, participants enrolled mostly in honors had varying perceptions of the standards in their classes. Malcolm, for example, suggested the honors classes were not as challenging as he had expected and further implied that school officials—administrators and teachers—had intentionally lowered standards in order to place more African American students. He stated: "I think it may have been dumbed down just because we don't think they can do well in these classes. Let's try to calm them down, talk to the teachers. I think things went on before they just put us in these honors classes. I'm not naïve to think that nothing was done. They didn't just put us in these honors classes, or put African Americans in these honors classes." I pushed Malcolm further on his comments by asking, "Are you suggesting that they [school administrators] did that in order to get the desired numbers to match the consent decree?" He responded: "Yes, why not? Or we would still have the consent decree and it wouldn't have ended in 2009. Right? Without the numbers…even with affirmative action, if you don't have the numbers, it stays. It stays."

Adam's response hinted at the possibility of standards dropping given the perception that "unqualified" African American students were being actively recruited and placed in honors. He commented: "There's such a push to get people to…excel over to honors classes that maybe they dropped the standards a little bit just because they have to. If you have more and more people who aren't suited for it, regardless of race, gender or anything, then maybe they'd have to drop the standards a little bit. I don't know." Grant offered a different perspective about the honors classes. He stated: "I don't think they lowered them at all because if they lowered them, then it would be like super easy and I think people who are actually like honors, like honors level thinking, they would just like…everybody would get A's, I mean they may try to get them but they just…it's not everyone gets them…" Grant suggested students still have to put in effort in

the honors classes in order to get good grades, and thus it may not be as "dumbed down" as Malcolm may have insinuated.

Although the original survey statement only asked students about standards in gifted, honors, and AP, I gave participants an opportunity to comment on the academic classes. In part, having participants comment on their experiences in the academic classes allowed the ones who enroll in mostly honors and AP to make comparisons of the expectations and standards at each level. Additionally, I was interested in learning more about the standards and experiences in the academic classes from the participants who do not take honors and AP classes. As anticipated, interview participants who are enrolled in mostly honors and/or AP classes overwhelmingly perceived the academic classes as having little opportunity for standards to be lowered even further. Some of their comments included:

> *Malcolm: The academic level classes in here, they're dumbed down. I could have been taking them in middle school really...Yeah. In the middle school I always had A's and B's. I feel like this academic is the same as middle school. I can do that like it's nothing.*
>
> *Adilia: Things are a lot slower in like the regular classes and I feel like you don't gain as much sometimes.*
>
> *Elle: I would always call my…classes that are not AP "blowoff" classes because we don't do anything in them.*

Mikey, who is enrolled in all academic classes, indicated the standards in his classes are actually increasing. He noted: "I would say they're getting a little bit harder because they're finding ways to improve it so where the student actually has to learn that information before they can move on to the next topic and learn the next topic." But, Vanessa, who is also enrolled in all academic classes, countered that the standards do occasionally drop to tailor to students' level of engagement: "I think a lot of the times that they do drop because people don't try hard enough so

they think that they have too much and they think it's too much on the students' shoulders so they try and drop it."

Students' perceptions of detracking for equity and excellence

In addition to having interview participants respond to the three closed-ended statements I selected from the 2009 climate study survey, I sought to gauge their attitudes toward detracking. As previously stated in Chapter 1, detracking is a general strategy used in hopes of achieving racial equity and excellence for all students through 1) making modifications within a placement system or structure, such as expanding the criteria or practices used for making placement decisions, to provide more opportunities for underrepresented students, specifically African American and Latino/a, to access upper level classes; or 2) abolishing traditional curriculum tracking and ability grouping systems within a class, subject area, academic department, or school-wide, in favor of mixed academic talent and more racially balanced classrooms (Burris & Welner, 2005; Oakes, 1985). "Detracking" is not a term is used in Unit 4; however, detracking methods, or Best Practices, as they are known in the school district, were implemented in the high schools as part of agreements made under the consent decree to increase the participation of African Americans in honors and AP courses. In particular, Unit 4's efforts to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in academic placement included, but were not limited to: eliminating Level 1 lower level classes, identifying "high potential/low achieving" minority students to participate in upper level, college preparatory classes, and permitting self-enrollment into advanced placement classes, to increase African American student enrollment in upper level classes. During the interviews, I did not make known to the participants that the aforementioned efforts had been implemented in Unit 4 to address racial disparities in placement. I chose not to tell them for four main reasons:

1) Given participants did not have much understanding of the consent decree, I did not want them to think that the only reason why African American students are enrolled in honors and/ AP is because of "special" efforts pursued within the school district;
2) Reforms to the academic placement structures and processes have been in place for an extended period of time and are now considered the new normal for academic placement;
3) I really wanted participants to focus on the possibility of Unit 4 implementing future efforts to address racial disparities in academic placement; and
4) I wanted participants to get the feel for what it is like to be treated as educational stakeholders, actively engaged in meaningful conversations with school and district officials about racial disparities in academic placement and developing policies, practices, and interventions.

As such, I simply asked participants, "How would you feel if we eliminated the different curriculum tracks?" Unbeknownst to them, this a question Unit 4 personnel have been posing as of late. I, too, had interest in learning their perceptions about detracking. I was interested in knowing if they support or oppose detracking and then infer how their stance might undermine or advance equity reform efforts in Unit 4. Although the question I posed only focused on whole school detracking, this approach proved successful in generating rich conversations and strong opinions about current equity reform efforts to address racial disparities in honors and AP enrollment as well as highlighting participants' support for traditional tracking and ability grouping practices. Responses to the question were quite similar in that participants did not perceive detracking was an appropriate approach for addressing equity and excellence issues in education:

> *Chico: I wouldn't think that would work because everybody learns in a different way." "If you did that…There's a certain amount of kids failing; there's a certain amount of*

kids that are like average. You've got these certain amount of people passing, so when you bring them all together, it's like OK, you're going to have some repeats.

Elle: AP and all of them? No. I think that would be an awful idea. Because I think as I progressed in school, I've been separated. I've separated myself to my academic work from the kids who don't care about school and for the kids who can't keep up with AP classes.

Adam: I heard that that was something that was being talked about. I think that's the stupidest possible thing they could do…because they'd be taking away AP classes too. Even then, just with the academic and honors, this is something I think is absolutely terribly stupid.

Malcolm: That cannot happen.

Adilia: I couldn't imagine something like that happening, but I don't think I like it.

Chardonnay: That would cause conflict. I feel people would complain. I feel a lot of kids wouldn't get along. The kids would complain about it. I feel if everybody was just in that one group, then some kids, they may know how to do the work or may be more advanced in doing the work quicker. Some kids may be lower and can't really do it or have a hard time understanding it. That can cause conflicts. The kids who know how to do it, they might start looking down on the kids that don't know how to do it.

These comments and others reflected participants' concerns about detracking, and inadvertently, endorsed the assumptions made by advocates of tracking that homogeneous grouping of students by academic talent and behaviors is a preferred method for instruction and achieving personal excellence. I assume participants would have similar, unfavorable opinions about the actual efforts pursued in Unit 4 to address the racial enrollment gap between African American and White students in upper level classes given their perceptions on whole school detracking, support for tracking and ability grouping, and the fact that Unit 4's efforts are common detracking strategies. Nonetheless, efforts were put forth with little to no regard for students' opinions. Current enrollment data indicates the representation of African American students is within racial boundaries in honors, but not AP classes. Unit 4 credits, in part, the detracking strategies

implemented for the increase in African American enrollment in the upper level classes. Though Unit 4 is no longer under the full consent decree and has been successful in achieving within bound representation of African American students in honors, a current trend, "dropping down," has the potential of significantly impacting recent achievements.

Mission Complete? Students' experiences of moving up a curriculum level

Prior to conducting interviews, I spoke with a Unit 4 school administrator, and he mentioned dropping down as a current issue. He noted that dropping down was quite common, especially among African American students who were attempting to move up to honors and AP. He said students often drop down because they do not complete the summer projects and therefore start the semester with zeros on major assignments that drag down their overall grade for the class. He also added that it is a struggle to get students to fully participate in the support programs and services available at the schools to help them succeed in the advanced classes. Our conversation led me to ponder how dropping down undermines equity reform efforts and impacts outcomes, such as the achievement of African American enrollment in upper level classes being within racial fairness boundaries. I explored dropping down and concerns with interview participants. I asked participants if they had ever attempted to take a class at a more advanced level than what they were accustomed. Several participants indicated that they had enrolled initially in a more advanced class but dropped down at the beginning or after the first half of a yearlong class. Chardonnay dropped accelerated Algebra 2 and picked up the academic level because of the pace of the accelerated class:

> "It's way easier for me because even the stuff, some of the stuff, most of the stuff I wasn't really understanding in my accelerated class because the teacher … I had her before. It's not the way she was teaching. It was the speed that she was going it's way too fast for me. I would only catch parts of it. I didn't really know. Then when I got to the academic class, I knew some of it because I remembered it. I understand it. The way the teacher taught us, it was like she made way it easier to understand also."

Mikey dropped accelerated Physics and became a teaching assistant for another class because he was having difficulty learning the mass amount of materials and it impacted his grade performance:

> "I dropped out of that because I finally hit my breaking point the highest level I can go… There is a lot of formulas. I didn't realize how many formulas there would be. I love using formulas and equations and stuff, but there was so much to do; there's so many steps to all these equations, and I was like this is too much. I gotta stop… I completed the first semester. It was the worst grade I could've expected which was a D for me. So I was like, I can't take this anymore, if my grades are going to be this low. It won't look good going towards college. I'm going to stop it now."

Grant dropped down from accelerated trigonometry to college trigonometry because of the homework load and pace of instruction:

> "The homework load was so much and they're … they're teaching it at like a really fast pace and I don't think I … I wasn't keeping up with them at all. Like the homework problems were like 2-62 each night and you know, with football, I didn't have a lot of time. I'm exhausted from practice and stuff. But with College Algebra they slow it down a little bit. They spend more time on it. I mean not College Algebra, College Trigonometry, excuse me, they spend more time on it, they slow it down and they help you if you've got questions and stuff. As opposed to accelerated where they like, they go really fast."

Penelope dropped down from AP US History because the summer assignments intimidated her:

> I almost did AP history, and I did the summer assignment and then I got scared and I dropped out… It was to read and annotate the first six chapters of the book and then you had to label a map of the US and that wasn't hard, I did that part. Then I started doing the chapter outlines and they were really long… You have to do a couple each week or something. Then I was afraid to take the test over the six chapters because we're supposed to take the test over the six chapters right when we got off the summer break.

Penelope also indicated it was difficult for her to balance having a job and completing the summer assignments. "I got a lot of service project trips over the summer and I currently have a job, it's kind of hard to do both. Like, be really active over the summer and then have to do your work too." Although she considered the summer assignments intimidating, when I asked her if

she thought more people would be interested in AP if the summer assignments were eliminated, she responded, “Yeah. I think so but at the same time I think that people would find out later on that they weren’t able to do it and that probably wouldn’t be a very good idea…I think that they try to intimidate you a little bit so that if you’re not up for it that you’ll know right away. Try to scare some people off.” She implied the summer assignments help weed out students who are unprepared for excelling in AP courses during the academic year.

Adam was also a victim of the weed out; however, his weed out experience happened on the first day of class. He was tasked with completing a pre-Calculus review handout in his AP Calculus AB class. He stated, “We were doing stuff … the sheet we got on the very first day was supposed to be review, and I didn't remember any of it from pre-Calculus last year so I was like … I had a little panic.” He dropped down to Calculus, which is also an accelerated class, but later had regrets. “Then I wish I hadn't, because in my Calculus class, even though it's still kind of challenging it’s still pretty easy. I got through it. The only reason it's challenging is because I don't … it's challenging to get motivated to do it sometimes. It's just kind of … it was really easy sometimes. I wish I hadn't stayed back … or stayed in AP Calculus.” It is very rare for students to be permitted to move up a level during the mid-year; moves are typically downward.

Although these students attempted to “step it up,” they were unable to be retained. This led me to explore the ways in which students perceived and utilized support programs and services that were available at the high schools. Although the high schools offer supplemental classes to provide additional support for core classes, like English and math, none of the interview participants have participated or seemed aware that they even exist. However, several participants commented on how they receive tutorial support from their teachers:

> *Chardonnay: Just if I don’t understand something then I can go in before or after school or during lunch sometime depending on the teachers because some teachers are really*

busy. If you can't get help from your teachers, then you can always go to a different teacher that teaches the same subject and get help.

Adilia: I am very stubborn, I don't like to ask for help, but I took an English class in my sophomore year that was really, really hard and really like a lot of times where I found myself after school asking for help because I am not the kind of person who likes raises her hand and asks a million questions in class. Like I would rather talk to the person after class.

Brady: I haven't had tutoring but I've gone in to see my teachers and ask for extra help or after I get a bad grade on a quiz. I have gone to the teacher to go over it so I learn for the test.

Carlton: In my AP classes it comes from getting more contact with the teacher kind of outside of school, before the class starts, emailing them, talking to them like I said after school or even after the class. Telling them, "Can I come in during my lunch period or something?" They're very open for you to catch something that you missed, or even to help you with an assignment that you just didn't have … that you just didn't get. There are special rooms during my sixth-hour lunch that teachers are there to help you with math homework, science homework or anything that you need help with. I find that very useful sometimes.

Penelope noted that it is the student's responsibility to seek additional support from their teachers:

> It really depends on the teacher I think but in the classes I've been in you have to find that, you have to go. The teacher is not going to be like; you should come in after school. They're not going to single you out because they don't, for the most part, I don't think that they actually care all that much.

One student, Vanessa, did not feel she could go to most of her teachers to get help. She said she felt like some of the teachers judged her because she used to be in resource classes:

> [Some of the teachers] understand where I came from, and what's happened and stuff. So they know that things are harder for me to get to know and they're more willing to work with me. Then, the other teachers just don't care and they think that I should be on top of things because I came from resource to normal classes.

One of Unit 4's signature, and most visible, programs for supporting and retaining

students, specifically African American, is the national program, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID is an in school honors opportunity and college readiness program targeting students in grades 6-12 who are considered in the "academic middle," earn mostly B's and C's, and "who have shown some promise and who, with support, can achieve success in accelerated classes" (District Handbook, 2011). According to the AVID website, "it's more than a program - it's a philosophy: Hold students accountable to the highest standards, provide academic and social support, and they will rise to the challenge" (http://www.avid.org/abo_whatisavid.html). Program participants take an AVID elective class daily, in which teachers and tutors provide instruction on topics, such as note taking, reading comprehension and writing skills, test taking strategies, and study skills; participants also explore colleges and careers.

Given the popularity of AVID, I was particularly interested in students' perceptions and experiences of the program and how it has benefited them. To my surprise, only one of my interview participants was in the program, Malcolm. When I asked if he was in AVID, he smiled and snickered and eventually said, "I'm in AVID." When asked if AVID has helped him, he instead talked about how he perceived teachers did not support the program and therefore it was not living up to its potential and students' expectations:

Malcolm: *I think in your honors classes and this is why the consent decree, it goes back to the consent decree. You understand why AVID was started ... because of the consent decree. Those teachers that were against the consent decree are against AVID.*

IB: *Oh so AVID doesn't have support is what you're saying?*

Malcolm: *Exactly. That's what I'm saying.*

IB: *Why they don't support AVID, because it targets certain students or...?*

Malcolm: *No because it's a consequence of the consent decree. We don't believe that the consent decree was here so why should AVID be here?*

IB: *Okay so right now what you're saying is the goal is to rid everything here of anything that's like a remnant of consent decree?*

Malcolm: *We don't like, as a country, we don't like to look in the past. We shy away from those things that aren't good and the bad that happened to us in our past. As the consent decree was not good, it was not good but I don't feel like we dealt with it. Some people didn't believe that it was real even though it was a consent decree. Like racism and segregation, some people just didn't believe it was real. Maybe it was a dream or a fairy tale, and that wasn't the case. Some people still feel like that.*

IB: *Would you recommend AVID to someone?*

Malcolm: *I would recommend Upper Bound for everyone.*

IB: *So you recommend Upper Bound for your additional supports but not so much...*

Malcolm: *I recommend AVID because I believe it has the intention of doing good.*

IB: *So hold on. So on paper AVID looks great but what you're saying that in actuality it may not necessarily…*

Malcolm: *Be the best that it can be ... yes, that's what I'm saying.*

Other students had participated in AVID in previous years but were no longer in the program. Chardonnay said she was not sure why she was no longer in it. She commented, "I know I was in it freshmen year. I did good. I had A's and stuff in it, but I don't know." Although she was no longer a participant, she still had a favorable perception of the program:

> It helps you be organized and stuff and make sure you're doing good in your classes. I wouldn't mind that. I just don't remember what happened about my schedule that I'm not in it anymore.

Grant participated in AVID in middle school, but did not continue into high school. He said he benefitted from AVID because he learned how to take better notes:

> Yeah, in seventh and eighth grade and I really didn't see what, for me, I don't know what … like AVID was … like how it helped. I mean, it helped you take notes better. Well, I honestly like the value in AVID as in like what it helped me do or what it was trying to help me with. I just felt that was like a better note taking class. Because, you know, if you're like … Somebody takes notes every week, so I felt like that was like, I presumed to like take notes and I don't know how it looks good on your college resume…

Adilia participated in AVID in middle school for a short period of time but quit at the end of the sixth grade because it was too highly structured and impacted GPA. She stated:

> It is basically the college prep class like it sounds really middle school, but it helps you prepare for college and even for high school. You like take notes and you have to keep your binder in a certain way and I just didn't do mine because I felt like, because I am a stubborn kind of a person and I like to set my own standards. And it would be. If you had a paper that was out of place in your binder your grade would be marked down and you have to take so many notes so that you can…like the teacher that I had, if you were failing…like I was always failing math and if I didn't understand the material and hadn't done the math, she would yell at you in front of the entire class and it was just…It wasn't my thing.

She said she knew people that stayed in the program; however, "most people want to quit…Because like my friend, it lowered her GPA a lot and she is actually…she had problems before too like she had a lot of problems going on her freshman year and even her entire sophomore year, but she got better and then AVID was dropping her GPA down so she quit and now she is doing better." Adilia's comments implied that if students did not adapt to the AVID methodologies, which were very rigid, then their grade for the AVID elective would be lowered and subsequently impact their overall GPA.

Some interview participants indicated they did not know much about AVID:

> ***Carlton****: I don't really know people in AVID. I know people in AVID, but I don't know if they're in AP as well. I think it would be helpful if there's a teacher that showed you how to organize stuff and how to keep on track with a planner and everything to keep your*

> *assignments going and everything. I feel like it would help you, but I can't answer that one personally.*
>
> ***Adam**: I know there is a program; they have a program but I don't …*

Penelope, on the other hand, recalled seeing students carrying AVID binders and wearing AVID t-shirts, but was unfamiliar with the program and who could participate:

> I don't know what it stands for. Do you know what it stands for?
> I didn't know that white people were allowed to be in it, to be completely honest with you. I thought it was like a club that only black people could be in and I felt so terrible because someone last year was like I was in AVID in middle school. I was like, "you are white." I said, how'd you get in?
>
> Some people have AVID t-shirts on, I'm like I don't know what this is.
>
> Some people have special binders that they keep. I've tutored after school for freshman and some freshman had this big binder and they're like yeah, I need to keep this because this is my AVID stuff. I was like, okay. I don't know what that is but good for you.

Similarly, Elle recalled seeing students carry AVID binders when she was in middle school. She stated, "I would always see people carrying around these huge AVID binders. It was like a requirement that if you're in AVID, you had to have binder checks. I remember they have these huge binders."

It seems tutorial support from teachers is the only extra help assistance students used. Given students lack of participation, awareness, and/or dislike for AVID, the program does not appear to be an effective method for helping, at least the high school students, to retain in their current placement or when they decide to "push up" and pursue a more advanced curriculum level.

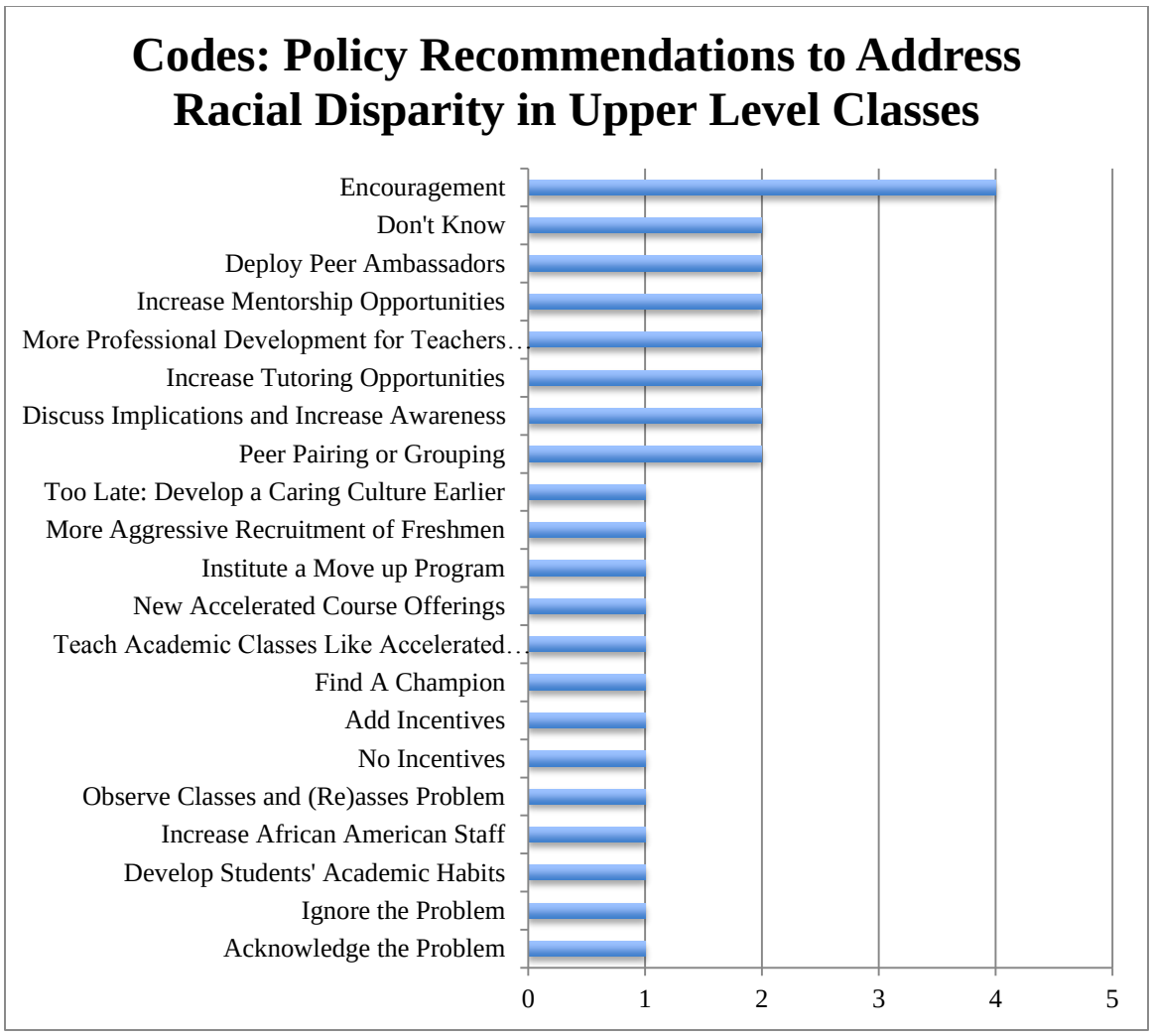
Students' perspectives on how to address racial disparities in honors and AP enrollment

I recognize, as well as the interview participants, that Unit 4 continues to have its "work cut out," post-consent decree, with trying to address the mandates for excellence and equity and

making sure students are having positive educational experiences, performing well academically, feeling socially and culturally accepted and connected, receiving a quality education, and are being retained and supported. I argue students are essential educational stakeholders in not only holding Unit 4 accountable to addressing the mandates for excellence and equity but also contributing to policy conversations on issues, such as the ones discussed in this study, that directly impact them.

During the interviews, I gave participants a platform to generate policy recommendations for addressing the racial disparities in the enrollment of African American and White students in upper level classes. I asked them, "If I made you superintendent for the day, what policies would you try to develop and implement," or rather, "what policy recommendations would you contribute, as an educational stakeholder, to a conversation about these types of issues." They generated a host of recommendations. Participants generated a wide range of suggestions as displayed in Figure 5.8. Some participants offered multiple policy recommendations; thus, the frequency of codes is greater than the total number of interview participants.

Figure 5.8 Participants' Policy Recommendations for reducing racial enrollment gap



In this section I briefly discuss "Encouragement" and why participants cited it the most. I also highlight a few of the other recommendations that I consider to be rather interesting coming from the mouths of students, such as "Teach Academic Classes Like Accelerated Classes" and "Find A Champion" (The Emilio Effect).

Four of the interview participants—of which several of them previously suggested the racial enrollment disparity was a result of student choice—recommended school administrators, and perhaps other students, provide more encouragement for African American students to consider enrolling in the upper level classes. Brady offered:

> I think there should definitely be more [encouragement], I mean because it would show or like kind of give [the school] a better representation. Like I think that there should be just a lot of encouragement when you have a lot of like they have started classes, to take the AP class to go on…because that's what happened to me, I was really on the bubble about taking the regular calculus, well, not regular, just the accelerated calculus over the AP and my teacher's like, you know what, go for the AP. You've gotten high B's in the accelerated Trig, why not, you know. So I think if there's a lot more encouraging to take the AP class, like you could do it, it's not…it's doable. I think that would increase the numbers.

Chardonnay suggested some of the encouragement should come from peers:

> Right now, I brought up the idea of having a mentor program…I'm trying to go both inside the building and in the middle school…I'm saying the upper class mentoring the lower class. Not lower class, the little kids. Underclass, that's what I mean…just help kids out from whatever struggles or problems they're going through. I wish when I was a freshman or whatever that I had that. I didn't, so I just want to help other people…It's better off coming from other students that already been through it and they already know how it is in school.

Chardonnay also recommended that teachers provide accelerated instruction in the academic classes and not let the students know until the class ends. She stated: "Maybe they can just, in the academic classes, they can give them maybe accelerated work and not let them know that it's accelerated work so that they can see if they can actually do the work. If they can, then the teacher can just tell them." Chardonnay's recommendation implies that efforts be taken to minimize the chances that stereotype threat will undermine student performance under demanding conditions. If students are kept in the dark about the level of challenge of their curriculum then they will be least likely to feel intimidated by expectations.

Chico provided a fairly interesting policy recommendation for reducing the racial disparity in upper level classes as well. He stated,

> It just take one. If you get the most popular dude in the school, somebody everybody kicks it with. If you can get him to move up to an AP class, it would be like, yo, this class is where it's at. You should really come up here. Even though it's an AP class, you get

> this amount of credit. The teacher helps you and it makes you a better student, and then yeah, you get two extra credits. Who don't want two extra credits? You might as well just challenge yourself and come up there. If you need help the teacher's there to help you…Boom! You got more kids coming up.

Chico's response reminded me of the movie, Dangerous Minds with Michelle Pfeiffer, whose character was Ms. Johnson, a white female, former Marine turned English teacher in an inner city, predominantly Black and Latino high school. In the movie, Ms. Johnson initially struggled to capture her students' attention. After class one day, one of her students, Cali, walked up to her desk and told her, "If you want their attention, get Emilio." Emilio was the popular student in class who was well respected in the school and the streets. Throughout the rest of the movie, Ms. Johnson worked to successfully perfect her relationship with Emilio in order to attract and maintain the attention and gain rapport with her students. Chico was suggesting a very similar strategy. He expanded upon his comments:

> You know, you do this in college too. It happens in high school and college. You'd be like, yo, beginning of the year, let me see your schedule, what class you in? Boom! You in this class? Hey bro, what that class like? Aw, for real? I'm going to try to get in that class. Not only are you with your friends, now you're in the class you think is cool. Then you get there, you and your friends is in this class, so you're all like, "yeah, that's what's up, we're going to be partners and everything, yeah." You're passing and your friend's passing, and now you got more of your friends want to come up to that class. Now you got a class full friends, not only is it going to be fun, now you have students passing and you got more minority students and now your class is more diverse. So there's more interaction. Then you never know who they might bring into their group. Now you got more people interacting, with their friends.

Interestingly, although I was quite intrigued with the policy conversation I had with Chico, upon reflection I recalled Unit 4 had previously pursued implementing a buddy system, but I am not certain of the details, and more specifically, if identifying an "Emilio," one who could really champion their efforts by grabbing the attention of the targeted population, was ever considered in the approach. Nonetheless, I was quite fascinated by the policy conversations I had with all of

my participants. Often students are "represented" in conversations like this by adult figures. Although I did not ask my participants how they felt about being "represented" in discussions around racial equity and academic placement, I provided them with a platform to discuss if students should be included in such conversations and in what ways might their inclusion be beneficial. Participants were unanimous in stating that they should be included in conversations about racial equity and academic placement as well as other pertinent issues that directly impact them. Some of the comments on student inclusion were as follows:

> *Grant: Well, I think they should be involved in them because everyone has their own opinion…and different people have different strategies or plans as to you know, fixing things or making them better. We could, I mean, you know, that since we're ones that are actually in this school running, see we're getting taught by the teachers, we could like come up with new ideas or ways to have them teach us better or have them make it easier for them to communicate with us like school wise or like in [inaudible] with human beings, talking person to person and…yeah.*
>
> *Adam: People from every different perspective, speaking about it, you can get a much better picture of what's actually going on because a lot of time, I think the administrators think that they know us better than they do and they think that they know what's best. I mean, they are the ones that are trained and stuff but I don't think they do enough of the talking to students. I mean, if you had a conversation like this with a bunch of people, the administrators thought you had a decent idea…a much better idea of what's needed, so I think they should absolutely do that more.*
>
> *Marcus: They can bring, what they can bring to the table is their opinion on what goes around in school. Then you can just follow up on that to tell what to do around the school.*
>
> *Vanessa: I think they should…because I think a lot of teachers would understand where other people are coming from and see how they feel about the classes and such.*

Chardonnay acknowledged some opportunities for students to engage in these types of conversations have already been established at the local high schools: "That's one of the reasons why they started the Social Action Committee so they can get students' opinions on it. We can

voice our opinions and let them know how we feel about these things. Then they can take it into consideration, change it, or keep it the same just based off of our opinions." Malcolm cautions, however, that you must have the right students "because some students just don't care but I feel like we all should care because it affects us. I heard, 'what doesn't affect us directly affects everybody indirectly.' So when we're not involved, someone's making these decisions for us."

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter I described the results from the Champaign Unit 4 2009 School Climate Study High School Survey and the findings from the individual interviews. Conclusions, a discussion of the data findings, recommendations, and future research considerations are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

RETHINKING THE TRACKS: A DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this dissertation includes 1) a discussion of the data findings from both phases; 2) a critical race theory perspective; 3) policy recommendations; 4) limitations of study; 5) suggestions for additional research; 6) contributions of study; and 7) a final thought to capture what this study means.

As explained in Chapter 1, educators and critics have highlighted the restricted inclusion of students' perspectives and voices in education policy and reform (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kennedy & Datnow, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1994; SooHoo, 1993), although students are the ones most directly impacted by such changes. Thus, in this study, I make the case for treating students as educational stakeholders and including them in developing, implementing, and evaluating equity efforts to address racial disparities in academic placement.

Discussion

Survey and interview participants overwhelmingly demonstrated support for curriculum tracking. Participants expressed that students have different academic needs and interests, which tracking can best accommodate. More specifically, participants indicated that through tracking, students get placed in classes that best match their academic ability and desired level of challenge, pace of instruction, and work ethic required to be successful in the class. Studies conducted by Falkeinstein (2007) and Jones and Yonezawa (2002) discovered similar findings that students have a high regard for curriculum tracking.

Participants in the current study also expressed their belief that the criteria typically used for making placement decisions, such as student choice and teacher and counselor recommendations, which are based on students' grades, standardized test scores, and behavior,

were fair. Participants perceived fairness in the criteria used for placement because the criteria were based on students' merit and gave students some authority in choosing their classes. Opponents of tracking argue that tracking structures, policies, and criteria are unfair and have resulted in African American, Latino, and students from low-income backgrounds being overrepresented in the lowest, under-resourced and remedial tracks and underrepresented in the higher, college preparatory tracks (Oakes, 1985; Tyson, 2011, 2013; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

In this study, a few of the African American students who provided comments on the survey and all of the interview participants except Mikey, who stated, "I don't see race," acknowledged that there are racial differences in enrollment in the different track levels. Participants stated that the racial composition of AP classes were vastly White and Asian, academic classes were nearly all African American, and honors classes were the most racially mixed of the three levels, but still majority White. A few participates noted that some of the honors and AP classes have no more than three, if any, African American students. Interview participants also described the differences in rigor, expectations, assignments, curriculum, and pedagogy across the different levels and characterized AP as the most challenging, honors as fairly easy, and academic as a repeat of middle school. A few participants, however, suggested the honors and academic classes were an appropriate match for their academic expectations. Nonetheless, this finding of student support for tracking despite participants' recognition of patterns in racial composition across the curriculum levels is particularly significant in that it provides a foundation for understanding and contextualizing students' attitudes toward academic placement. It also serves as context for why students may, or may not, support efforts that seek to modify or transform tracking structures for greater equity and excellence.

As stated previously in Chapters 1 and 4, Unit 4 participated in a voluntary consent decree from 2002-2009 to address a host of racial disparity issues in the schools, but of interest to this study, the disparity in enrollment between African American and White students in upper level classes. Findings from the current study suggest participants have mostly an unfavorable opinion about the school district's effort to address the gap. The unfavorable opinions are best explained by participants' support for tracking, as previously discussed; perceptions that standards have dropped or will drop, particularly in the honors curriculum, as a result of the equity reform efforts; beliefs that the nature of the racial enrollment gap is the result of African American students not choosing the upper level classes during registration; and attitudes that the best remedy for closing the enrollment gap is more African American students choosing to be in the upper level classes.

Standards

Survey participants seemed to express more opposition to reform than the interview participants. This is likely due to the fact that students who participated in the 2009 survey were more informed about the consent decree and the intentional, court-monitored efforts being implemented to eliminate unwarranted racial disparities in upper level classes. Their attitudes reflected those of adults (administrators, teachers, and parents) who at the time were dissatisfied and growing weary of reform in the district (Aber et al., 2010). Survey participants characterized Unit 4's reform efforts as "playing a numbers game." They perceived African American students were being placed in classes, in which they were not qualified (i.e., did not have good standardized test scores, grades, and work ethic) for the purposes of increasing the appearance of diversity and fulfilling the guidelines set forth in the consent decree. Likewise, one of the interview participants, Adam, compared the reform efforts to affirmative action policy and

suggested some African Americans were being placed in upper level classes in order to fill a quota and as a result were taking spaces away from other, more deserving and qualified students. Some participants expressed that these efforts were misguided and impacted (or had the potential to impact) academic standards in the upper level classes.

A common fear expressed by adults and students of detracking reform is that the standards and quality of education in the upper level classes will lower (Benbow & Stanley, 1996). This fear appears real for some of the students in the present study. Some participants, particularly those enrolled in the honors curriculum, expressed that their classes were not challenging and that teachers spent a significant amount of time repeating material, attending to behavioral issues, and assisting struggling learners, which ultimately slowed down the pace of instruction and reduced the amount of content covered in the class. Malcolm, one of the interview participants, expressed that he believed teachers had intentionally lowered the standards in the honors classes because they did not think the African American students were intelligent and could handle the challenge of the honors curriculum. Other participants indicated that they were not sure if standards had dropped, but offered that the possibility of lowered standards was conceivable given some students would likely not be able to keep up with the pace and instruction of the honors curriculum because they did not have the academic talent and work ethic. This finding can serve as a major barrier for policymakers interested in promoting a detracking agenda. Policymakers will have difficulty garnering the support of students for future reform efforts that seek to “push up” academic students into upper level classes unless they become more attentive to maintaining or enhancing the quality and rigor of the advanced curriculums.

Choice

Very few participants (e.g., Malcolm and Penelope) in my study perceived the disparity was (or could be attributed to) the result of racial discrimination. Survey and interview participants largely perceived the enrollment disparity between African American and White students in upper level classes was the result of students exercising choice in course selections. As stated in Chapter 4, in accordance with the high school registration process, students are permitted to choose their classes, and they are likely to be assigned to the classes they have chosen unless guidance counselors, teachers, and/or their parents recommend they be placed differently.

Participants noted that students take into consideration varying factors when selecting classes during registration. For example, Carlton, an AP student, expressed that he chose mostly AP classes because he knew that college admissions weigh the level and amount of rigor students pursued in high school, while Chico, an academic student, indicated that he chose classes based on the instructor and students he anticipated would be in the classes given his preference for enrolling in classes with people who "look like" and "get" him. Thus, participants perceived that students choose classes that match their academic and/or personal needs. As such, participants, especially those that participated in the 2009 survey, largely did not consider the racial disparities between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes to be a serious issue that warranted a response from Unit 4 administrators. Participants suggested the only way the enrollment gap in the upper level classes would shrink is if more African American students in the academic level would renegotiate their academic and/or personal needs and choose the more advanced classes. Participants' policy recommendations reflected their

understanding that student choice was the best remedy for closing the racial enrollment gap in upper level classes.

Choice, alone, is not sufficient

Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) acknowledge that freedom of choice is popular because students get to select the classes they are most interested in taking, and policymakers get to shift the onus of fixing the disparity onto students. The authors argue, however, that freedom of choice, alone, is not a successful approach for addressing the racial disparity that exists in upper level classes. In their study, they found choice "failed because it also continued the structural and cultural facets of low-, middle-, and high- track classes. It failed because it left intact the schools' tracked structures, or the spaces that students occupied, and the identities and social relations that students formed in response to track placements" (Yonezawa, et al., 2002, p. 38).

The present study also revealed that freedom of choice, alone, is not sufficient for closing the racial enrollment gap in upper level classes given students can undermine choice as a reform effort. For example, data suggests students chose classes that they considered were "safe" spaces in which they felt welcomed and comfortable. Interview participants, in particular, discussed their perceptions of the students enrolled in curriculum levels different from theirs. These discussions revealed that some students held strong—and at times negative—opinions of students and teachers in a different curriculum level from theirs that, in return, influenced their impressions of the climate, or safety, of a particular class or classes.

A few of the academic students indicated that students and teachers in the advanced classes made them feel as if they were less than or beneath the advanced students. The academic students felt the advanced students perceived them as unintelligent, lazy, and not caring or taking

value in education. A couple of the academic students that I interviewed, Marcus and Vanessa, seemed to have internalized some of those characterizations and offered them as reasons for choosing the academic classes. Survey and interview data support these characterizations of the academic students. For example, one of the White male survey respondents commented, "if you are smart and up to it you can be in an AP class or honor class, there is nothing racist about it." Elle, one of the interview participants who enrolled in mostly AP classes, stated, "as I progressed in school, I've been separated. I've separated myself to my academic work from the kids who don't care about school and from the kids who can't keep up with AP classes." Likewise, the academic students held strong opinions about the students enrolled in the advanced curriculums. Chico, in particular, characterized the students in the upper level classes as "know-it-alls" and "rich, White kids" and indicated that he would rather be in the academic classes where he felt safe and comfortable and not have to worry about being judged by his peers or teachers. It is quite conceivable that some of the White academic students share similar sentiments as Chico.

Few participants said they had friends in a curriculum level different from theirs. This finding supports work previously conducted by Hallinan and Williams (1990) and counters the work of Yonezawa and Jones (2006) who found that students interact with or have peer relationships with students in different curriculum levels. Findings from the present study suggests that if the goal is to push more African American students from academic into the upper levels, how their new classmates and teachers will receive them once they are placed and other climate issues must be considered. Otherwise, some of the African American students will continue to perceive the classroom climate in the upper level classes as negative and be more inclined to remain in the academic classes, which they have determined are safer spaces. Therefore, rather than exercising their freedom of choice to "move up," they instead took

advantage of choice to stay put, which undermines choice as a reform effort to address the racial disparity in upper level classes.

"Cooling out". The study also revealed through students' perceptions of and experiences that the academic support structures at their school may not be effective in retaining African American students in upper level classes. Interview participants discussed their experiences of being "pushed up" and then "cooling out" (Clark, 1960; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006), or dropping down. Some participants noted that they had dropped down from a higher-level class to a lower-level class (i.e., AP to honors or honors to academic) for a host of reasons including, but not limited to, pace of class was too fast, did not complete summer projects, too much homework, curriculum was too difficult, and did not like the teaching style. The majority of participants indicated that if they needed extra help with their assignments, they could receive tutoring from their teacher before, during, and/or after school. Several of the students in my study indicated that they were not always able to go to the teacher for tutoring since they were involved in clubs and sports before and after school and/or left campus during the lunch period. The inability to participate in tutoring opportunities with their teacher may impact whether some African American students, in particular, are retained in a class in which they may be struggling. Other academic support opportunities are available at the schools, such as academic support classes; however, none of the interview participants seemed aware of these opportunities when I asked them. Lack of participation in or awareness of tutoring and other support opportunities by African American students struggling in their upper level classes may result in their return to academic classes, and thus undermine reform efforts.

Further, the present study revealed some African American students had concerns with the design and implementation of AVID and thus chose not to participate. AVID is regarded as a

signature program for providing support and retaining African American students enrolled in upper level classes and preparing them for college. African American students enrolled in upper level classes are not required to participate in AVID; however, according to district policy, teachers and counselors should work "diligently to encourage and support students to participate in AVID as a means to help bolster academic skills necessary for honors/AP level courses once exiting middle school as well as those high school students advancing on to college" (630.07). As previously stated in Chapter 4, African American and other underserved students who are receiving a grade of C or lower in their upper level classes are placed on an academic watch list and receive school level interventions and support through counseling, tutoring, and AVID.

Although AVID is a signature program for supporting and retaining African American students, participation at the high school level, especially among juniors and seniors, is low. Only one of the interview participants in my study, Malcolm, was affiliated with AVID and several others discontinued their participation after middle school or just after freshman year. Findings from this study revealed that most of the African American participants perceived that AVID at the high school level had the potential of being a great support program, but a few participants noted that they did not like the rigid structure and that at times the AVID class negatively impacts grade point average (GPA). Malcolm added that he was not sure he would recommend students participate in AVID. He did not feel that teachers supported the program and as such were not invested in its survival and success. Students' lack of interest in participating in AVID suggests the program may not be an effective support, as currently implemented. As such, struggling students in upper level classes may prefer to drop down to an academic class rather than receive support through participation in AVID, which they perceive

may cause additional harm to their GPA; thus, students undermine reform efforts that aim to increase and retain African American students in upper level classes.

Findings from this study support arguments to include students as stakeholders in shaping and evaluating reform efforts to achieve racial equity in academic placement. Students and their perspectives are indeed critical to education equity reform conversations, particularly around academic placement, in part because they 1) provide classroom level accounts of the direct impact of reform in their daily lives as students; 2) can identify factors that determine the effectiveness and flaws of academic support structures; and 3) can best evaluate the safety of their classes through their experiences. In the next section I offer recommendations for how to engage students in Unit 4 equity reform efforts, in specific, and more generally how to continue making strides in the recruitment and retention of African American students in upper level classes.

Transforming the tracks: A critical race theory perspective

In this study, participants were asked how they perceived the nature of the racial disparity that exist in enrollment in upper level classes between African American and White students. They were also asked questions about their attitudes toward and experiences of the Unit 4 efforts to remedy the racial disparity. A few of the interview participants, like Adilia, Penelope, and Malcolm, suggested that racial discrimination, in the form of interpersonal racism, might account for some of the racial disparity between African American and White students in upper level class enrollment. However, when given the opportunity to offer policy recommendations for addressing this disparity, their proposals did not address the perceived racial discrimination. Instead, they, as did several other participants, mentioned that African American students needed mentors to encourage them to move up to the upper level classes.

Chico was one of the only participants to suggest the racial disparity might be, in part, the consequence of institutional racism. He did not directly state that the disparity was an institutional issue. However, the telling of how he thought the upper level classes were too white—in terms of people (students and teachers), content covered, and how teachers taught the classes—and how he perceived the teachers and students judged him as not very smart and unmotivated, suggested he recognized institutional racism contributes to the racial disparity in upper level classes. In particular, he highlighted the ways whiteness is normalized, privileged, and used to assess students of color. He proposed more African American teachers be assigned to teach the upper level classes and the popular African American students typically enrolled in academic classes "check out" the upper level classes first and then report back on whether they recommend that other African American students in academic classes move up.

By contrast, the overwhelming majority of survey and interview participants perceived race does not influence which classes students are placed in. As previously noted, an African American female survey participant stated, "I think that this [survey] is a waste of time. People aren't in honors classes because they don't want to be. I think if everyone stopped making the biggest deal about the smallest things everyone would stop thinking every problem has to do with race." Another student, White male, stated, "Some people who are not as gifted and do not get placement in certain courses call it racism when it was just a teacher picking the more deserving person for a course position." These and other participants perceived placement decisions are largely the result of a) students freely choosing classes during registration and/or b) the recommendations of teachers and guidance counselors, which are based on their assessment of students' merit—standardized test scores and grades—and behaviors, such as work ethic. Therefore, participants perceived the nature of the racial disparity in upper level classes to be the

result of African American students not choosing such classes or being deemed unqualified for participation based on the assessments previously mentioned. Thus, participants suggested students should be held responsible for creating and remedying the racial enrollment differences in upper level classes. These findings suggest participants support liberal visions of race reform in education, which promote colorblind racial ideologies.

According to Kimberle Crenshaw (2011), through a colorblind or liberal ideology, laws, practices, policies, and institutions, such as schools, are considered to be race-neutral; all persons are treated as equal as possible with no regard to racial identities; and racist acts are anomalous, intentional incidences by individuals. Moreover, racial subordination and disparities are perceived as "merely opportunities yet to be realized by individuals disinclined to take advantage of them" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1318) rather than markers of exclusion. Critical race theory offers a critique to the colorblind, liberal approach to antiracism, highlighting how it fails to recognize the institutional and structural reproduction of White racial power. CRT expresses that White supremacy is maintained within laws, policies, and structures by way of systemically normalizing whiteness, or standards of white culture. Further, CRT acknowledges that administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and even students, are complicit, intentionally or not, in maintaining such systematic racial power.

A previous study on high school student perspectives of tracking and detracking concluded students embrace a tremendous sense of equity as they are able to critique the system because many know peers who they feel the system does not adequately serve (Yonezawa & Jones, 2006). The present study seemed to yield a different representation of students possessing such a strong sense of equity, particularly racial equity towards academic placement. Several participants in this study perceived that academic placement policies and criteria, such as

standardized test, grades, choice, and teacher and counselor recommendations, are colorblind. However, standardized tests have been criticized for exhibiting racial bias since tests are constructed in ways that do not recognize language and experience differences of minority populations (Ford et al., 2002; Oakes, 1995; Williams, 1983). Students' grade performance is in many ways a reflection of a curriculum in which minority populations do not see themselves reflected and teaching pedagogies that are not necessarily culturally responsive to them (Banks, 2009). Although choice is a strategy commonly used to "open up the tracks," teachers and counselors may still advise students from minority populations to not pursue the more advanced classes because they do not think they can handle the academic challenge or possess a strong work ethic (Blaisdell, 2006). Teachers' and counselors' advice may be influenced by their judgments of students of color through a lens that takes whiteness as normal. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) defines whiteness as "a location of structural advantage, of race privilege;" "a 'standpoint' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society;" and "a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p. 1). Contrary to the perspectives of the majority of participants in this study, the racial disparity in upper level classes is, in many ways, a systemic issue, and the underrepresented group (African American students) should not be fully responsible for remedying the disparity.

This study sheds light on some students' understanding of racism. Racism exists in many forms; however, often, students more easily identify interpersonal racism because it is blatant discriminatory interactions between individuals. Failure to acknowledge other forms of racism, in particular systemic or institutionalized racism, offers some explanation for why students may appear to be complicit in their own oppression, i.e., support academic placement structures and policies that produce inequalities and privileges whiteness. I do not think students, i.e. youth, are

to be held fully responsible for being complicit in their own oppression, for they are deeply influenced by the dominant narrative offered by some (white) adults in the local community, including parents and school staff, who explain the reproduction of inequalities as "the way it is" rather than owning their privilege and thinking about how policies are crafted. Thus, as adults grow in their understanding of institutionalized racism, likewise youth will expand their understandings and perhaps be able to better critique polices that affect them but do not recognize it.

Critiquing youth perspectives, and more specifically their understandings of racism, does not constitute a dismissal of their perspectives any more than it would of any other stakeholder group. Successful intervention in multi-stakeholder settings and processes, by definition, requires eliciting and integrating differing and sometimes competing perspectives. I concur with Sonia Nieto (1994), as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, that, "Nobody has all the answers, and suggesting that students' views should be adopted wholesale is to accept a romantic view of students that is just as partial and condescending as excluding them completely from the discussion" (p. 398). I also take heed of Gloria Ladson Billings' (1998) words that "adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it" (p. 22).

Although participants offered several policy recommendations for increasing the representation of African American students in upper level classes, they did not really offer antiracist solutions for fixing the placement system. Without a serious investigation and response to the ways in which race influences placement decisions in Unit 4 high schools and how administrators, teachers, and students are, intentionally or not, complicit in maintaining white racial power within educational structures and promoting whiteness as normal, the racial

disparity between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes will continue to be reproduced. In the next section, I present a set of policy recommendations that stem directly from students' attitudes toward and experiences of equity reform efforts as well as policies that are based on my understandings and evaluations of equity reform efforts in Unit 4 and the critique of racism in education structures, such as academic placement.

Policy Recommendations

Unit 4 has put forth a host of equity reforms over the past decade to address the racial disparity that exists between African American and White students enrolled in upper level classes. Efforts have included, but were not limited to, identifying "high potential/low performing" African American students to participate in upper level classes with additional support; eliminating Level 1 remedial classes; and giving students freedom of choice in class selections. However, according to SY2013 data, African Americans accounted for 35% of all students enrolled in Unit 4 high schools, but only 21% of all students enrolled in honors, which is just barely within racial fairness bounds (-14%), and 8% of all students enrolled in AP, which is out-of-bounds (-27%). Thus, after a period of implementing reform, African American students continue to be underrepresented in upper level classes.

Findings from the present study suggest students are capable of and sometimes do undermine equity efforts and impact desired outcomes. Findings revealed that some African American students at times feel unsupported and uncomfortable in the upper level classes and decide to move down to the academic classes, which they perceive as safer spaces. In a similar vein, findings also suggest that some African American students, and even some of the White students, perceive the upper level classes are filled with "rich White kids" and teachers who think the academic students are not smart, have poor work ethic, and do not care about their

education. As such, peer relations and interactions across tracks may suffer, which affects school and classroom climate. Furthermore, students who may otherwise consider "pushing up" into the upper level classes might use their freedom of choice to remain in the academic classes. Although participants offered several policy recommendations to address the gap in enrollment, my analysis and understanding of the impact of Unit 4 equity efforts, the current curriculum enrollment data, findings from this study, and the critique of racism in education structures, like academic placement, leads me to advocate for transformation, a deconstruction and reconstruction, of the academic placement structures.

Although I advocate for transformation, I do not think it makes sense strategically for Unit 4 to advance a transform agenda immediately, especially given the opposition and push back to reformation from some administrators, teachers, parents, and students who endorse tracking practices and fear academic standards will be impacted and status and opportunity will be lost for privileged students if transformation is implemented. I also acknowledge that findings from this study revealed all of the interview participants vehemently opposed transformation, particularly by way of whole school detracking. As such, I recommend interventions that are both reformative and transformative in hopes that limited reforms will pave the way for garnering enough support to implement transforms to academic placement.

Recommendation 1: Adopt some of the students' recommendations for increasing the representation of African American students in upper level classes

Before I diverge into my own set of policy recommendations, I want to first acknowledge the voices of the students who participated in my study. Several survey participants offered policy recommendations without any solicitation, and each interview participant was asked how they would go about addressing the racial disparity between African American and White

students enrolled in upper level classes. Students generated several policy recommendations, which were presented in Chapter 5. Participants' top recommendation is for Unit 4 to create more opportunities for African American students to be encouraged to choose advanced classes. They suggested this could be accomplished through providing a platform for African American students currently enrolled in advanced classes to share with academic students about experiences and offer them words of affirmation, such as "you can do this." They also mentioned that college students or adults could serve as their mentors and provide them with additional guidance and personal and professional development support. Some of the African American participants acknowledged that they had participated in a local mentoring program for many years, but now that they are older and have a better idea of what they want to do after high school, a new mentor with similar personal and career interests and youthfulness would be more appropriate. Participants also offered that Unit 4 teachers should raise their expectations for students enrolled in the academic track and reduce stereotype threat by teaching the academic classes like the honors classes and not inform the students until the class has concluded. Participants perceived this method could be effective in providing additional encouragement and boosting the self-esteem/concept of those who do not feel they are smart enough or can handle the more advanced classes. Further, they recommended that Unit 4 officials identify and recruit the popular student/s in the academic classes, or as I refer to as an "Emilio" from the movie *Dangerous Minds*, to "test the waters" of the advanced curriculums and report back to students about their experiences and whether they recommend other students "move up". The idea is that the Emilios are tasked with determining if the advanced classes are safe spaces. Students often have respect for the Emilios at their school and as such are willing to be more receptive to their advice and lead.

Recommendation 2: Evaluate and enhance the quality of the honors curriculum and the support structures for assisting and retaining African American students in the upper level classes

Findings suggest that standards in the honors curriculum may have been compromised. The honors curriculum is typically characterized as "challenging," "rigorous," and "fast paced." However, as a result of the equity reform efforts made to academic placement, many students in this study perceived those qualities were not maintained. Participants perceived that students newly enrolled in honors classes, who were previously enrolled in the academic classes were often not prepared for honors and that the teachers seemed to have very low expectations of them and perhaps intentionally reduced the challenge, rigor, and pace of the classes. As previously stated, opposition to detracking reform is often fueled, in part, by the belief that standards in the upper tracks will be negatively impacted. Thus, policymakers must be attentive to the standards of the upper tracks as a means of building and sustaining support for equity reform and paving the way for transformation. I recommend Unit 4 officials perform a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of current support structures, such as tutoring, supplemental classes, and AVID, which are intended to assist and retain students, particularly those in the advanced classes, and then use evaluation findings to enhance, eliminate, and/or build new supports as necessary. I recommend Unit 4 further explore some of the concerns students raised about AVID, namely how the AVID class negatively impacts students' GPAs. I recognize AVID is a national model program and is known for its rigid structure, however, as currently implemented and experienced by students targeted by the program, findings, though limited in scope, suggest AVID may not be the most appropriate program for supporting African American students in the upper level classes in Unit 4.

I also recommend opportunities be created for teachers to receive training and professional development on 1) how to effectively integrate students identified from the academic classes as "high potential" into the honors classroom, and 2) how to challenge the normative beliefs, particularly around ability and intelligence, that they may have about African American students. The establishment of teacher inquiry groups (Watanabe, 2006) may be an effective space for teachers to share their best practices for integrating the students and engaging in deep conversations about normative beliefs. "Participants in teacher inquiry groups engage in deep, "systematic and intentional inquiry" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 24) into their own ideologies as well as their instructional or school practices, often using research literature as "prompt(s) ... for personal reflection" (Stokes, 2001, p. 148)" (Watanabe, 2006). Teacher inquiry groups are also an ideal space for teachers who "get" students like Chico to exchange strategies with other teachers on how they can make their classes safer spaces for African American students who indicated that their choice of classes is deeply influenced by cultural belongingness.

I would be remiss to not mention that Chico indicated he also prefers to be in classes with teachers that "look" like him. I recognize the challenges in increasing the number of African American teachers in Unit 4 schools and know that this is an on-going effort and district commitment. In the meantime, Unit 4 officials should explore their teacher assignment patterns, and be extra attentive to where the African American teachers are being placed. How many African American teachers are assigned to teach the academic classes? Honors classes? AP classes? Answers to these questions can serve as an entry into exploring teacher placement patterns and can potentially have a meaningful impact on increasing the representation of African American students in upper level classes.

Recommendation 3: Reestablish the AP Scholars Summer Academy and inaugurate the Future Honors Preparation Summer Academy

I recommend the reestablishment of the AP Scholars Summer Academy, a collaboration between the University of Illinois College of Education and Unit 4, in which a group of approximately 40 African American high school students spent seven weeks engaged in English and history coursework. Participants completed summer assignments for fall classes in the mornings at their high school and social justice research projects in the afternoon at the University. The program was also connected to the Workforce Investment Act, which allowed academy participants to receive a bi-weekly payroll check. This permitted students to forgo a summer job and instead focus on their studies. I am unfamiliar with the details of why the program ended after only one summer. However, as one of the research instructors for the program, I think with some minor adjustments and additional funding, the program has the potential of not only preparing African American students for participation in the AP curriculum but also developing their critical consciousness through engaging in social justice projects that affect them and their families and communities. A similar version of the program should also be established for African American students being pushed into the honors curriculum. Through the summer academy, students would experience and become familiar with the challenge, rigor, and pace of the honors curriculum in advance of the start of the fall semester. Implications for such a program for future African American AP and/or the honors students are that it could 1) ease the concerns persons have about maintaining the academic standards in the upper level classes; and 2) reduce the number of students who “drop down” or “cool out” from the upper level classes.

Recommendation 4: Increase opportunities for student interaction across tracks

As previously discussed in this chapter, findings suggest students may have formed negative perceptions of students in curriculum levels different from theirs and as a result, interactions and peer relationships across tracks suffers. Student perceptions of one another is of great concern, in part, because they have the potential to impact school climate. One way to increase peer interaction across tracks is through enhancing the structure and experience of the classes that are required but are only taught at the academic level, such as Modern U.S. History for seniors.

Notably, these were the classes that the participants in my study often referenced as the class they least liked. The advanced students complained that such classes were academic level classes and offered little challenge, were repetitive, had low expectations, and moved at a slow pace. On the other hand, the academic students did not like those classes because they felt the advanced students were always trying to be "know-it-alls," interrupting the teacher, and passing judgment about other students. These types of classes are ideal, however, for testing out a detracked structure in which the teacher can 1) set high expectations for all students in the class; 2) use differentiated instruction and culturally relevant pedagogies to "reach" students of varying talent and interests; and 3) have students engage in partner activities and group projects that require them to become acquainted with one another. I posit that through such efforts, student interaction increases by way of their participation in projects, and their impressions of one another, including normative beliefs and stereotypes, would be ideal for change given the expectations set for all students by the teacher and the academic standards set for the class.

Recommendation 5: Continuously engage students as educational stakeholders in developing, implementing, and evaluating education equity reform efforts

In recent years, Unit 4 has established a few spaces that are prime for student engagement, and in which some students are already active. One in particular is the Social Action Committee (SAC). The SAC is a space created for teachers and students to engage in conversations around issues at the schools, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and bullying, and develop and implement actions in response. The SAC at one of the schools meets after school hours. Thus, the appeal of the committee may be difficult to sustain in the long term given the host of commitments students already have after school, including practice for extracurricular activities, employment, tutoring, and homework.

Given the constraints around time and interest in establishing a more sustainable format, I recommend the SAC be merged into the social justice seminar, which was introduced in the Unit 4 middle and high schools in 2012. I also recommend that the social justice seminar be opened up to freshmen and sophomores. Currently, the social justice seminar is restricted to juniors and seniors.

Another space that currently exists is the Education Equity Excellence Committee (EEE). The EEE committee is an initiative carried over from the consent decree, in which Unit 4 officials (principals, teachers, administrators) and members of the community (parents, representatives of community organizations, and individuals invested in the mission of the committee) collaborate in evaluating and discussing targeted equity areas, such as academic progress in advanced classes, and reviewing corresponding disaggregated data. Noticeably absent from the committee are students. It is not clear under the current committee membership guidelines if students are eligible to serve. Student representation would be very beneficial to this

committee as they can add voice and classroom level experience to the data and issues discussed within the committee. Additionally, this committee could serve as a great space for students to bring forth discussions and recommendations generated from the social justice seminar and other school platforms.

Implementing the aforementioned limited reforms can pave the way for transformation. Unit 4 needs transformation that:

1. Pushes educational stakeholders to fundamentally shift in their way of thinking about the assumptions of curriculum tracking that suggest students should be grouped and separated by perceived academic talent and given access to different curriculums, pedagogies, and resources.
2. Insists educational stakeholders problematize "high potential/low performing students" language and question if students are not identified as "high potential," are they then "low potential"?
3. Demands educational stakeholders problematize language such as "eliminate *unwarranted* racial disparities" and question what are *warranted* racial disparities?
4. Challenges educational stakeholders to fundamentally shift their way of thinking about how to eliminate racial disparities in placement and break away from implementing detracking methods that seek to fix the current placement system (reform), such as giving students freedom of choice and identifying "high potential/low performing students" to participate in upper level classes with additional support. Instead, stakeholders should be tasked with deconstructing the current system and reconstructing a new, more equitable placement system (transform) through efforts such as detracked classrooms, subject areas, or departments, and whole school detracking.

I offer the following two recommendations as potential first steps in initiating transformation of the academic placement structures.

Recommendation 6: Explore and present best practices and exemplary detracking cases to different stakeholder groups

There are employees, community members, and parents in Unit 4 who have been invested in equity efforts in the district for a long time and have expressed interest in pursuing a transform agenda. I recommend these transformers build support for detracking by forming a diverse core unit of educational stakeholders to explore and present exemplary detracking cases to different stakeholder groups. Jo Boaler (2008) and Illana Seidel Horn (2006) provide examples of schools that have had success in detracking single classrooms and subject areas, and Doris Alvarez and Hugh Mehan (2006) and Kevin Welner and Carol Burris (2006) offer examples of successful school-wide detracking efforts.

Unit 4 transformers should also investigate detracking efforts at Evanston Township High School (ETHS), a school located in Evanston, IL. ETHS has garnered state and local attention for its detracking initiative, the "earned honors" curriculum, which was first introduced in 2010 for freshman humanities classes, such as English and history, and again in 2011 for freshman biology. "Earned honors" mean, "students can only get honors credit if they meet certain academic benchmarks — in an effort to broaden the variety of students in classes and address the achievement gaps between white and minority students" (Ortega, April 9, 2013, para 7). Research studies are currently being conducted by a professor at Northwestern University to determine the effectiveness of the detracking program at ETHS. I also recommend Unit 4 transformers explore the opposition expressed by students, parents, teachers, and some school board members through different media outlets and during the local school board elections.

Candidates for elected positions used the detracking efforts at ETHS as a major platform issue, which garnered additional attention from the community as well as neighboring towns and cities who were also considering equity efforts.

I also recommend Unit 4 transformers explore the works of Welner and Burris (2006), who suggest best practices for "winning over" the opposition, such as having "stable and committed district leadership," "teachers eased into heterogeneous classes," "collection and dissemination of achievement data," and "earnest response to parental concerns about learning and achievement" (pp. 93-94).

Recommendation 7: Create opportunities for students and other educational stakeholders to enhance their critical consciousness

Findings from this study and the 2009 climate study report suggest some students' and adults' critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) needs to be enhanced. "Critical consciousness is the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society" (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Without enhanced critical consciousness for students, and adults alike, the racial disparity in upper level classes might not be perceived as a racial problem that warrants actions, such as detracking. Thus, support for detracking and other educational equity practices might suffer.

One such opportunity that can be created for students to enhance their critical consciousness is youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects. YPAR allows students to "critically examine oppressive school policies and institutional forces that shaped their educational pathways" (Welton, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, participation in YPAR projects might enhance students' abilities to better critique educational policy and use critical race theory tools, such as naming whiteness, property analysis, and revisionism, to unveil oppression in academic

placement and discover the ways in which students and adults are complicit in the reproduction of racism within educational structures. The present study is an initial step in entertaining and elevating students' voices on issues that impact them, like racial disparities in academic placement. YPAR projects can give students opportunities to engage in long- and short-term projects, within or outside of the classroom, on education topics and policies that impact them and thus chart a pathway to transformation.

Limitations of Study

I did not strive to have a representative sample. However, not having a representative sample does place a limitation on the inferences that I can draw from the data. Students chose to participate in my study; as such, I am only capturing some of the perspectives from students who were interested in being interviewed. I am not sure if students who did not participate in my study held similar views as those who did. Nonetheless, I do think I captured a broad perspective or set of views from the students who accepted my invitation to participate in this study.

Additionally, I used data previously collected via the Champaign Community Unit School District 2009 High School Survey. Given the survey was not designed specifically for my study, I was only able to use data collected for three of the sixty-eight closed-ended statements, which limited my data analysis. Moreover, a small sample of African American students (N=10) provided relevant comments on the open-ended portion of the climate study survey. This limited my use of data from African American students to illustrate the numerical results from the closed-ended statements.

Also, I was given a very limited time frame to enter and exit the high school for recruitment purposes and conducting interviews. As such, I was unable to conduct multiple interviews with participants or spend a significant amount of time building rapport.

Future Research

Additional research is needed on students' attitudes toward academic placement to uncover differences by curriculum level. Differences by curriculum level emerged in the interview data and were at times more distinguishable than those by race. Participants enrolled in mostly honors classes expressed the most dissatisfaction toward the reformed academic placement practices that resulted or extended from agreements made under the equity consent decree. Unlike participants enrolled in AP and the academic level, several of the honors participants expressed not being challenged and compared their classes to the academic curriculum. Some of them had attempted AP classes in order to get the challenge they so desired, but the AP classes were too difficult or time consuming given several of them indicated they had jobs and/or participated in sports. For several of these participants they expressed feeling out-of-place; the AP curriculum was too challenging, and the academic classes felt like middle school.

Additional research may generate more in-depth understandings of their attitudes and experiences toward academic placement and the reform efforts implemented to eliminate racial disparities in upper level classes. Research may also reveal ways to better accommodate these students and give them the level of challenge that they desire. Further, enhancing the standards in the honors curriculum is important to paving the way for transformation given fears that standards will suffer as a result of detracking. In the interim, the suggestions outlined under *Recommendation 2* should be taken into consideration.

Future research may also consist of investigating what differentiated instruction might look like in the Unit 4 high schools, starting with the classes that are required but only currently offered at the academic level. Research may also explore how to evaluate the success of differentiated instruction. The success of differentiated instruction in a select few classes has

implications for the future detracking of other classes, subject areas or departments, and whole school.

Contributions of Study

This is the first study to record students' attitudes toward and experiences of equity efforts to address the racial disparity that exists between African American and White high school students enrolled in upper level classes. Additionally, this study enhances our understanding of students' attitudes toward tracking and detracking. Furthermore, this study contributes to the scholarly literature on student voice, student engagement, and detracking.

Final Thought: So what?

Students are educational stakeholders, too. They are more than capable and interested in participating and contributing in meaningful ways to the conversations and efforts around addressing racial disparities in academic placement. They offer unique and critical insights from everyday experiences at the classroom level to evaluate the success of equity efforts. Not involving students as education stakeholders may lead to avoidable opposition to equity reform/transform. Such opposition might take the form of resistance that undermines efforts, impacts desired sustainable outcomes, and leaves school officials and other adults confused about the reproduction of racial disparities within school structures like academic placement.

This study also demonstrates students' desire to feel intellectually, socially, and emotionally safe in the classrooms in which they are placed. Often the aforementioned forms of safety are treated separately and under-articulated; however, they are connected. As expressed in this study, students take into consideration a myriad of factors when exercising choice in class selections and ultimately choose the classes they perceive are a good fit and/or safe spaces. They desire safe spaces in which they feel they belong, are respected and understood, and can grow in

excellence. As such, when students who are typically enrolled in the academic curriculum do not perceive an upper level classroom to be a safe space, they may be unwilling to take on the social, emotional, and academic risk (i.e. compromise their GPA) of "pushing up" to a more advanced curriculum.

Further, this study reveal that students' critical consciousness needs to be enhanced in order to better unveil oppression in education structures and policies and to chart a pathway to garnering support for transformation of the current academic placement structures. Otherwise, they will continue to be complicit in their own oppression.

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APPENDIX A

School Climate Survey: Middle and High School Version

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Use only a No. 2 pencil. Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens.

Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.

Make solid marks that fill the response bubble completely.

Make no stray marks on this form.

This survey is designed to collect your opinions of your school's social climate. Your answers are anonymous and you will not be identified in any way. Please answer the following items about yourself.

1. Gender
   - ○ Male
   - ○ Female

2. Your grade:
   - ○ 6
   - ○ 7
   - ○ 8
   - ○ 9
   - ○ 10
   - ○ 11
   - ○ 12

3. Your grades:
   - ○ Mostly A's
   - ○ Mostly B's
   - ○ Mostly C's
   - ○ Mostly D's
   - ○ Mostly F's

4. Years attending your current school:
   - ○ First
   - ○ Second
   - ○ Third
   - ○ Fourth
   - ○ Fifth
   - ○ Sixth or more

5. Race/Ethnicity (If bi- or multi-racial, please mark all that apply):
   - ○ Black or African American
   - ○ White
   - ○ Latino/a
   - ○ Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
   - ○ American Indian
   - ○ Other

6. When I eat lunch at school:
   - ○ My family pays for my lunch
   - ○ My family does not pay (we qualify for free or reduced price lunch)
   - ○ Not sure

7. I am enrolled in at least one honors / AP class. ○ Yes ○ No

DIRECTIONS: We would like to know how you feel about your school. There are no right or wrong answers. Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by filling out one of the six responses. If you are not sure or do not know how you feel, answer "Not Sure." Please fill in only one response after each sentence.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
1. My teachers expect me to go to college.	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. My teachers care about academic success.	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. My teachers think I am going to get good grades.	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. My teachers think I am intelligent.	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. My teachers expect me to graduate from high school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. My teachers think Black students are going to get in trouble a lot.	○	○	○	○	○	○

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Page 1 - Please continue on Page 2 >>>>>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
7. I feel worried about people being judgmental when I talk about race.	O	O	O	O	O	O
8. I feel comfortable talking about race with everyone in this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
9. There are some teachers at my school with whom I would not feel comfortable talking about race.	O	O	O	O	O	O
10. Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.	O	O	O	O	O	O
11. Students have problems at school because their parents do not value education enough.	O	O	O	O	O	O
12. One of the main reasons more Black students than White students are suspended is because their parents do not stress the importance of education.	O	O	O	O	O	O
13. Students who get suspended tend to come from families who do not value education.	O	O	O	O	O	O
14. I feel like I have been labeled as a "bad kid."	O	O	O	O	O	O
15. I feel like I have been labeled because of my race.	O	O	O	O	O	O

Are there other things you would like the school system to know about diversity issues? If so, please write your comments here.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
16. My teachers understand my point of view.	O	O	O	O	O	O
17. My teachers respect me.	O	O	O	O	O	O
18. I trust teachers to keep their promises.	O	O	O	O	O	O
19. My teachers are too nosy.	O	O	O	O	O	O
20. I feel that I am disciplined fairly at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
21. Teachers take students' learning styles into account when teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O
22. At my school, students are disciplined fairly regardless of their race.	O	O	O	O	O	O
23. African American students are treated fairly at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
24. The Champaign School System treats students of all races fairly.	O	O	O	O	O	O
25. I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in.	O	O	O	O	O	O
26. I think students' race influences how much they are disciplined in school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
27. I am given as many opportunities to succeed as my classmates.	O	O	O	O	O	O
28. I believe I will be able to do most jobs that I would want when I finish school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
29. I believe I can choose my own future pathway in life.	O	O	O	O	O	O
30. I believe there are many good possibilities for me in the future.	O	O	O	O	O	O
31. My teachers do not understand what life in my neighborhood is like.	O	O	O	O	O	O
32. At my school, I have a close friend from another racial group.	O	O	O	O	O	O
33. Teachers take students' cultural backgrounds into account when teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O

Page 2 - Please continue on Page 3 >>>>>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
34. If teachers and principals had a better understanding of their students ethnic backgrounds, there would be fewer disciplinary problems.	O	O	O	O	O	O
35. My school should spend more time teaching about non-White cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
36. My teachers already teach what is most important about different cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
37. Hiring more non-White teachers and administrators will better address the needs of students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
38. At my school, we need to talk more about racism.	O	O	O	O	O	O
39. I wish we learned more about African American history/literature at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
40. The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between Black and White students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
41. The school district should reduce the difference in special education enrollment that exists between Black and White students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
42. The school district should reduce the difference in suspension rates that exist between Black and White students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
43. I feel like I belong at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
44. I feel welcome to join most non-sports clubs/activities (e.g., year book, band, choir, Key Club, Chess Club, student government, etc.) at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
45. Students at my school believe that some clubs/activities/sports are for White students and others are for Black students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
46. I believe I learn more because of the diversity of students in my classes.	O	O	O	O	O	O
47. Most of my friends like being in my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
48. People in my family say good things about my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
49. Teachers at my school are well prepared to teach students of all races.	O	O	O	O	O	O
50. My teachers make me feel like they understand people of different races.	O	O	O	O	O	O
51. I can take special classes (e.g., Latino studies, African American History) if I want to.	O	O	O	O	O	O
52. I feel prepared by my teachers to talk about race with adults at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
53. My teachers make it easy to talk about race in class.	O	O	O	O	O	O
54. I feel well informed about the consent decree.	O	O	O	O	O	O
55. Champaign Unit 4 schools should stop paying so much attention to race.	O	O	O	O	O	O
56. The Police Officers in Champaign's middle and high schools help to reduce the number of discipline issues in these schools.	O	O	O	O	O	O
57. I feel safer in my school because of the presence of the Police Officer.	O	O	O	O	O	O
58. I feel safe at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
59. I feel comfortable talking to the Police Officer at my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
60. Standards in gifted / AP / honors classes have dropped in recent years.	O	O	O	O	O	O
61. Some students who need special education services do not get them.	O	O	O	O	O	O
62. Some students who do not need special education services get placed in them anyway.	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
63. Racial problems in our schools are rare isolated situations.	O	O	O	O	O	O
64. White people in the school district have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.	O	O	O	O	O	O
65. Racism may have been a problem in the past, it is not an important problem in the district today.	O	O	O	O	O	O
66. Teachers at my school seem to avoid disciplining African American students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
67. My school treats students of all races fairly.	O	O	O	O	O	O
68. My teachers treat students of all races fairly.	O	O	O	O	O	O
69. I have felt uncomfortable in school because of my race.	O	O	O	O	O	O

Please fill out the following three questions concerning your experiences during your current school year.	Never	A Few Times	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
70. How often has a teacher treated you badly because of your race?	O	O	O	O	O
71. How often has another student treated you badly because of your race?	O	O	O	O	O
72. How often have you experienced racism at your school?	O	O	O	O	O

73. I am aware of the consent decree. O Yes O No

74. Have you received a suspension during the 2008-2009 school year? O Yes O No

75. Number of disciplinary referrals (DRs) you have received during the 2008-2009 school year.

O 0 O 1-4 O 5-9 O 10+

O Please fill in the bubble to the left if you are interested in working to end inequities in Champaign schools. You can see results from this survey and contact the University of Illinois School Climate Research Team at http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/climate

If you have any comments you would like to make about this survey, your school, or additional comments about diversity, please write your comments below.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

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APPENDIX B

The Pre-Interview

Thanks for your interests in participating in this study. Due to the expected high volume of interested participants not all students will be able to participate. This form will assist in making final selections of students to participate in this study. Your Pre-Interview form will be destroyed if you are not selected to participate in this study. Please complete this form to the best of your ability and return this form with your consent forms. If you have any questions, and/or concerns, the research investigators contact information is listed at the bottom of this document.

Name (First and Last): _____

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Place a check mark in the appropriate blank.

Race/Ethnicity (if bi-racial or multi-racial, please mark all that apply):
_____ African American/Black
_____ Caucasian/White
_____ Latino/a
_____ Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
_____ American Indian
_____ Other (please indicate): _____

Gender:
_____ Male
_____ Female
_____ Other (please indicate): _____

When I eat lunch at school:
_____ I/My family pay/s for my lunch.
_____ I/My family do/does not pay (we qualify for free or reduced price lunch)
_____ Not Sure

Your Grade Level:
_____ Ninth grade
_____ Tenth grade
_____ Eleventh grade
_____ Twelfth grade

School Affiliation:
_____ Currently enrolled at Champaign Centennial
_____ Current enrolled at Champaign Central
_____ Graduated from Champaign Centennial
_____ Graduated from Champaign Central

Your typical grades:
_____ Mostly A's
_____ Mostly B's
_____ Mostly C's
_____ Mostly D's
_____ Mostly F's

Your typical class schedule:
_____ Mostly General/Regular Academic Classes
_____ Mostly Honors Classes
_____ Mostly Advanced Placement Classes
_____ Mostly Honors AND Advanced Placement Classes

_____ I do not know.

School Schedule: Complete the table with your daily/class schedule. The information provided will be utilized to schedule your interview for this study.

Class Period	**Time**	**Class/Activity**
1st Hour	8:10-9:00	
2nd Hour	9:04-9:54	
3rd Hour	9:58-10:48	
4th Hour	10:52-11:42	
4A	10:52-11:15	
4B	11:19-11:42	
5th Hour	11:46-12:36	
5A	11:46-12:09	
5B	12:13-12:36	
6th Hour	12:40-1:30	
7th Hour	1:34-2:24	
8th Hour	2:28-3:18	

****

Investigator: Ivory M. Berry, Doctoral Student
Educational Policy, Organization, and Leadership
360 Education Building
1310 S. Sixth Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(318-308-4733; iberry2@illinois.edu)

Responsible Principle Investigator: Dr. Mark Aber
Associate Professor of Psychology
725 Psychology Building
603 E. Daniel Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(217-333-6999; maber@illinois.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE PARENTAL CONSENT (for Minors)

Month X, 2013

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Ivory Berry and I am a graduate student from the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois. My research director, Dr. Mark Aber and I would like to include your child, along with some of his or her peers, in a research project on students' thoughts on and experiences with the structures, processes, and implications for being placed into their academic classes at their school. This project also seeks to learn more about whether students feel all racial groups are treated fairly at their school when it comes to being placed in upper level classes, such as honors and advanced placement, since some racial groups, such as African Americans, are historically underrepresented in upper level classes. Further, the project focuses on students' thoughts on if school district administrators should get involved with trying to address racial differences in enrollment, specifically between Whites and African American students, in upper level classes. If your child takes part in this project, he or she will participate in one 45-60 minute individual interview with the research investigator (Ivory), sharing thoughts and experiences concerning academic placement. Your child may be selected, at a later date, to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group discussion, should it be necessary for this project, with 8-12 of his or her peers and the research investigator of the project after the individual interview, to continue in depth conversations similar to those in the individual interview. Individual interviews and focus groups, if conducted, will take place at your child's current (or former) high school, the Champaign Public Library, or UIUC College of Education.

No known risks, greater than those that exist in daily life, are anticipated. The research investigator is qualified to engage your child and/or guide a discussion with your child and his or her peers on issues around academic placement. Should you be selected to participate in a focus group discussion, please note group participants will be asked to keep discussions confidential. The research investigator cannot guarantee, however, that focus group participants will not share the group discussion and "who said what" with outside persons, including faculty, staff, administration, parents, and other students. Your child will be able to choose not to respond to any question for any reason without penalty. Your child's participation may be able to help influence future school policy in the Champaign Community Unit #4 School District around issues concerning academic placement.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and will not impact your child's grades or status at school. Your child may stop participating in the project at any time without penalty. Not all students who would like to participate in my project will be able to given the design and limited number of spaces. The enclosed pre-interview questionnaire will assist in selecting participants for the individual interviews, and again later, should it be necessary for the project, to identify focus group participants.

Individual interviews will be audio recorded if given consent/assent. Otherwise, the research investigator will rely on taking detailed notes during the individual interview. If conducted, focus group discussions will be audio recorded. If you and/or your child do/does not consent/assent to be audio recorded, your child will not be permitted to participate in the focus group. Audio recordings will be transferred to a password-protected file and securely stored on an external hard drive accessible only by the research team for this project. Recordings will be deleted from its original device. To ensure confidentiality of responses, actual names will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts from the individual interviews and focus groups discussions, if conducted.

The results of this project may be used for a dissertation, journal article, book, conference presentation, and/or scholarly paper. Your child's comments may be featured in one of the publications listed above. Your child's name will not be included in any final reporting of findings or publications. To show my appreciation for your child's participation in my project, a $5 gift card to a local restaurant, such as Sonic or Dairy Queen, will be offered to all individual interview participants, and pizza and beverages will be provided during the focus group discussions, if conducted.

Please indicate below if you consent to your child's participation in this project. Ask your child to bring one copy of this completed form, via hand delivery, along with his or her pre-interview questionnaire, sealed in the envelope provided, to the main office at your school or the research investigator, listed immediately below, by _____ (insert due date). The second copy is for your records. If you have any questions, comments, and/or concerns about this project, you may contact the following persons at any time:

Investigator: Ivory M. Berry, Doctoral Student
Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership
360 Education Building
1310 S. Sixth Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(318-308-4733; iberry2@illinois.edu)

Responsible Principle Investigator: Dr. Mark Aber
Associate Professor of Psychology
725 Psychology Building
603 E. Daniel Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(217-333-6999; maber@illinois.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@uiuc.edu.

****

Consent to participate in project.

Individual Interview

I **DO** give permission for my child**,** _____ (name of child), to participate in an **individual interview**.

If you consent to your child's participation in an individual interview, please place a check mark next to the appropriate statement:

_____I consent to my child's individual interview being audio recorded.

_____I **DO NOT** consent to my child's individual interview being audio recorded.

Your child will be asked to reaffirm his/her assent at the start of the individual interview and focus group discussion, if conducted. He/ She may opt-out of the project at any given time.

Focus Group

If your child is interested in being selected to participate in a focus group discussion, should it be necessary for this project, please insert your child's name in the consent statement below. Please note focus groups will be audio recorded. Students who are not willing to be audio recorded will not be permitted to participate in a focus group discussion.

I **DO** give permission for my child, _____ (name of child), to participate in one of the **focus group** discussions, which will be audio recorded, if conducted.

****

I have read this consent form, discussed any concerns or questions I have with the research investigator, and understood the project's risks and benefits.

_____ Date _____Parent's signature

****

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE ASSENT LETTER FOR MINORS

Month X, 2013

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Ivory Berry and I am a graduate student from the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois. My research director, Dr. Mark Aber and I would like to include you, along with some of your peers, in a research project on students' thoughts on and experiences with the structures, processes, and implications for being placed into their academic classes at their school. This project also seeks to learn more about whether students feel all racial groups are treated fairly at their school when it comes to being placed in upper level classes, such as honors and advanced placement, since some racial groups, such as African Americans, are historically underrepresented in upper level classes. Further, the project focuses on students' thoughts on if school district administrators should get involved with trying to address racial differences in enrollment, specifically between Whites and African American students, in upper level classes. If you take part in this project, you will participate in one 45-60 minute individual interview with the research investigator (Ivory), sharing thoughts and experiences concerning academic placement. You may be selected, at a later date, to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group discussion, should it be necessary for this project, with 8-12 of your peers and the research investigator of the project after the individual interview, to continue in depth conversations similar to those in the individual interview. Individual interviews and focus groups, if conducted, will take place at your high school, the Champaign Public Library, or UIUC College of Education.

No known risks, greater than those that exist in daily life, are anticipated. The research investigator is qualified to engage you and/or guide a discussion with you and your peers on issues around academic placement. Should you be selected to participate in a focus group discussion, please note group participants will be asked to keep discussions confidential. The research investigator cannot guarantee, however, that focus group participants will not share the group discussion and "who said what" with outside persons, including faculty, staff, administration, parents, and other students. You will be able to choose not to respond to any question for any reason without penalty. Your participation may be able to help influence future school policy in the Champaign Community Unit #4 School District around issues concerning academic placement.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and will not impact your grades or status at school. You may stop participating in the project at any time without penalty. Not all students who would like to participate in my project will be able to given the design and limited number of spaces. The enclosed pre-interview questionnaire will assist in selecting participants for the individual interviews, and again later, should it be necessary for the project, to identify focus group participants.

Individual interviews will be audio recorded if given assent. Otherwise, the research investigator will rely on taking detailed notes during the individual interview. If conducted, focus group discussions will be audio recorded. If you do not assent to be audio recorded, you will not be permitted to participate in the focus group. Audio recordings will be transferred to a password-protected file and securely stored on an external hard drive accessible only by the research team for this project. Recordings will be deleted from its original device. To ensure confidentiality of responses, actual names will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts from the individual interviews and focus groups discussions, if conducted.

The results of this project may be used for a dissertation, journal article, book, conference presentation, and/or scholarly paper. Your comments may be featured in one of the publications listed above. Your name will not be included in any final reporting of findings or publications. To show my appreciation for your participation in my project, a $5 gift card to a local restaurant, such as Sonic or Dairy Queen, will be offered to all individual interview participants, and pizza and beverages will be provided during the focus group discussions, if conducted.

Please indicate below if you assent to participating in this project. Only students who have received written consent from their parent(s) and want to participate in the project will be allowed to participate. Submit one copy of this completed form, via hand delivery, along with your signed parental consent form and the pre-interview questionnaire, sealed in the envelope provided, to the main office at your school or the research investigator, listed immediately below, by _____ (insert due date). The second copy is for your records. If you have any questions, comments, and/or concerns about this project, you may contact the following persons at any time:

Investigator: Ivory M. Berry, Doctoral Student
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If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@uiuc.edu.

****

Assent to participate in project.

Individual Interview

I, _____ (insert name), assent to participate in an **individual interview**.

If you assent to participate in an individual interview, please place a check mark next to the appropriate statement:

_____I **DO** assent to my individual interview being audio recorded.

_____I **DO NOT** consent to my individual interview being audio recorded.

You will be asked to reaffirm your assent at the start of the individual interview and focus group discussion, if conducted. You may opt-out of the project at any given time.

Focus Group

If you are interested in being selected to participate in a focus group discussion, should it be necessary for this project, please insert your name in the assent statement below. Please note focus groups will be audio recorded. Students who are not willing to be audio recorded will not be permitted to participate in a focus group discussion.

I, _____ (insert name), assent to participate in one of the **focus group** discussions, which will be audio recorded.

****

I have read this assent form, discussed any concerns or questions I have with the research investigator, and understood the project's risks and benefits.

_____ Date _____Participant's signature

****

APPENDIX E

16. SAMPLE SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PART I: Background

Introductions
Ice Breaker: Check-in
Overview of Project and Purpose of the semi-structured individual interview
Confidentiality and Safe Space
Permission to be audio recorded
Consent/Assent

PART II: Personal Experiences/Stories about Racial Fairness in Academic Placement

What are your thoughts concerning the following statements/questions:

I think students' race influences which classes they are placed in. Do you think your race influence which classes you are placed in? Do you think other students' race influence which classes they are placed in? Explain.

The school district should reduce the difference in gifted and talented enrollment that exists between African American and White students. Why or Why not? Is this a serious racial problem that needs to be addressed? Why or Why not? Is it fair that the District has implemented efforts to address this issue? Why or Why not?

Standards in gifted/AP/honors classes have dropped in recent years. Why or why not? Can you share any personal experiences/stories that support your opinion?

PART III: Fairness in Academic Placement

Do you think schools need academic placement structures, in which students are sorted into classes based on perceived talent and ability? Why or why not?

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having an academic placement structure in schools? What are the implications (future outcomes for students) for placement?

Do you think the academic placement process is fair, in general, and as you see it played out at your respective school?

Why is it or isn't fair?
How do you think you were placed in your classes?
Do you think students are often misplaced?
What do you think would cause them to get misplaced?

How does it make you feel when you're in a class and you don't think a student deserves to be in there?
Does it affect you in any particular way?

PART IV: Education Equity

Do you think schools and school districts should come up with ways to increase the representation of African American students in upper level classes or should African American students be held responsible?

African American students are underrepresented in upper level classes; why do you think they are underrepresented?
Do you think it could be the result of racist policy or practice?
How would you go about fixing the problem?
Or is it a problem at all that warrants being fixed?
How would it make you feel if the District were to do something about increasing the number of African American students in upper level classes?
Do you think these types of actions are currently taking place in your respective school? Provide examples.
How has it affected you as a student?

PART V: Race and School Policy

Can a school policy or practice be considered racist in nature and if so, give an example? Why or Why not?

Does racism still exists?
If you had to think of a racist moment at your school, what initially comes to mind?
What makes the policy or practice racist or how would you know that a policy or practice is racist or discriminatory in nature?

PART VI: Equity and Excellence in Education

What is the relationship (if there is one) between equity and excellence in education?

How do students define equity?
How do students define excellence?
If you could only pursue equity or excellence in education, which would you choose and why?
Can they coexist?
Can you think of a scenario in school where you see both equity and excellence playing out?
How would it make you feel if the District decided to pursue a racial equity initiative at your school?

APPENDIX F

Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.950	9133.673[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.050	9133.673[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	18.989	9133.673[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	18.989	9133.673[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
Race	Pillai's Trace	.119	65.001[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.881	65.001[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.135	65.001[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.135	65.001[b]	3.000	1443.000	.000

a. Design: Intercept + Race

b. Exact statistic

APPENDIX G

Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.325	231.051[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.675	231.051[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.482	231.051[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.482	231.051[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.003	1.461[b]	3.000	1437.000	.223
	Wilks' Lambda	.997	1.461[b]	3.000	1437.000	.223
	Hotelling's Trace	.003	1.461[b]	3.000	1437.000	.223
	Roy's Largest Root	.003	1.461[b]	3.000	1437.000	.223
Grade	Pillai's Trace	.003	1.316[b]	3.000	1437.000	.268
	Wilks' Lambda	.997	1.316[b]	3.000	1437.000	.268
	Hotelling's Trace	.003	1.316[b]	3.000	1437.000	.268
	Roy's Largest Root	.003	1.316[b]	3.000	1437.000	.268
Performance	Pillai's Trace	.016	7.565[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.984	7.565[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.016	7.565[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.016	7.565[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
AP	Pillai's Trace	.003	1.540[b]	3.000	1437.000	.202
	Wilks' Lambda	.997	1.540[b]	3.000	1437.000	.202
	Hotelling's Trace	.003	1.540[b]	3.000	1437.000	.202
	Roy's Largest Root	.003	1.540[b]	3.000	1437.000	.202
Lunch	Pillai's Trace	.004	1.813[b]	3.000	1437.000	.143
	Wilks' Lambda	.996	1.813[b]	3.000	1437.000	.143
	Hotelling's Trace	.004	1.813[b]	3.000	1437.000	.143
	Roy's Largest Root	.004	1.813[b]	3.000	1437.000	.143
School	Pillai's Trace	.009	4.459[b]	3.000	1437.000	.004
	Wilks' Lambda	.991	4.459[b]	3.000	1437.000	.004
	Hotelling's Trace	.009	4.459[b]	3.000	1437.000	.004
	Roy's Largest Root	.009	4.459[b]	3.000	1437.000	.004
Race	Pillai's Trace	.068	34.972[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.932	34.972[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.073	34.972[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.073	34.972[b]	3.000	1437.000	.000

a. Design: Intercept + Gender + Grade + Performance + AP + Lunch + School + Race