

INCREASING MINORITY ENROLLMENT IN  
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

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## ABSTRACT

The achievement gap between Black and White students has been an area of concern for a number of years. One of the contributing factors to this gap is the low minority enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. By reviewing literature on the subject, some of the reasons suggested for low enrollment are the “Acting White Syndrome”, socioeconomics, teacher expectations/perceptions, and selection processes. New Hanover High School is not exempt from the problem of low minority enrollment in AP classes, and has recently implemented a program help prepare students—minorities in particular—for AP classes. Through interviews with Black students who are currently enrolled and those who are not enrolled in AP courses, it is apparent that the “Acting White Syndrome” weighs heavily on their participation in these classes. The interviews also shed light on the fact that New Hanover High School needs to design a program to make more students and parents aware of the AP program. It is concluded that by implementing a program to increase AP awareness, more minorities may be inclined to participate in AP classes and thus help close the gap between White and Black students.

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Finally, to my immediate family, Tyese and Miles, maybe things will be back to normal until I start the next degree in August. To my extended family thanks for all your prayers, words of encouragement and money to get me to this point. I love you all.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Miles. I cannot wait for the day when I get to read yours.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the past several years there has been a concerted effort to close the achievement gap between White and minority students. However, this effort is not a new one. For decades, there have been attempts to reduce the academic gap between White and minority students, and at one point progress was being made. Between 1970 and 1988, the achievement gap between African American and White students was cut in half, and the gap separating Hispanics and Whites declined by one third (Haycock, 2001). During that same time, the White-African American gap in performance for 13-year-olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test shrank by 22 points on a 500-point scale, or the equivalent of two grade levels (Rothman, 2001). The gap in mathematics narrowed by a similar amount between 1973 and 1986. In both cases, African American performance rose while White performance remained stable (NCES, 2001). That progress came to a halt around 1988, however, and since that time, the gaps have widened (Haycock, p. 2).

Today, there is a renewed energy placed on narrowing the achievement gap, from the national level to the local school level. One specific area of emphasis for North Carolina as well as other states in the nation is increasing minority enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Nationally, approximately 75,000 students took more than 1.2 million AP exams in May 2000. Only 36,000—less than five percent—were African American. Minority students also tend to pass the classes at lower rates. While the national passing rate for AP courses nationwide is 65 percent, the rate is only about 33 percent for Black students and about 50 percent for Hispanic students (College Board, 2000). Also in 2000, the College Board reported that 1,752 Black Students took at least one AP course in North Carolina out of a total of 21,871 AP students, or



seven percent. Even in the schools that have a very high proportion of African American students, that same percentage is not necessarily reflected in the class rolls for advanced courses (Burdman, 2000).

This thesis will address causes for such a low minority enrollment in AP courses at New Hanover High School (NHHS) and propose specific strategies to increase minority enrollment in AP courses. From analyzing the literature on the subject of minority enrollment in AP courses, the following themes have emerged that affect minority enrollment: the “Acting White Syndrome”, socioeconomic status, selection processes, and teacher expectations. These themes will be explored further in Chapter One, based upon a review of the literature gathered on the subject of low minority enrollment in AP courses. In Chapter Two, these themes will be applied to New Hanover High School. School demographics will be examined and the opinions of AP and non-AP students—gathered through interviews—will be analyzed to determine if there is a direct correlation between the aforementioned themes and low minority enrollment in AP classes. Chapter Three will allow us to take a look at what programs, if any, are being implemented at New Hanover High School to increase minority enrollment in AP classes. This chapter will also examine a proposed program that is designed specifically to increase minority enrollment in AP classes.

## CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter we will explore key and recurrent themes that emerged from reviewing literature on minority enrollment in AP classes. In particular this chapter focuses on the “Acting White Syndrome,” socioeconomic factors, selection processes, and teacher expectations and perceptions.

### The “Acting White Syndrome”

Many minority students, particularly African Americans, struggle with acceptance and being “true to the race.” If these students are not accepted by their peers or do not overcome these struggles they are seen as “acting White.” One of the major symptoms of acting White is academic achievement. Research done by ethnographers Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986) shows that this problem is exacerbated by many minorities not wanting to be seen as a “traitor” by acting in a manner deemed as White. One major reason some Black students do poorly in school is that they experience alienation and ridicule for academic excellence.

Historically, White Americans did not acknowledge Black Americans as having a high level of intellect but did acknowledge them as being skilled physically (Fordham and Ogbu, 117).

Subsequently, many Black Americans began to doubt their own intellectual capability, define academic success as White people’s prerogative, and began to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating White people in academic striving (Fordham and Ogbu, 218).

Students who take AP courses feel the brunt of harassment from their peers for acting White or “Uncle Tomming,” as it is sometimes called. Warren Bolton, an African-American editor for *The State* newspaper in South Carolina, described some of his ordeal growing up.

As a student who took Advanced Placement classes throughout school, I don't think I was spared many of the smart kid jokes. "What's wrong with you Bolton? You mad the library is closed?" I was called braniac, schoolboy, you name it. Some kids didn't want me around because I 'knew too much'. Some of my peers made it clear that I was not like them. I did stuff White kids did: I carried books home and made good grades. (Bolton, 2000)

Acting White is not limited to academic achievement. It reaches into speech, dress and manner. Bolton goes on to say:

Speaking grammatical English or wearing Polo clothes, plaid shorts or button down cotton shirts was acting White. So was listening to Bach or the Beatles. Acting White was playing clarinet in the school band, reading Seventeen Magazine, playing golf, tennis, or taking advanced courses.

Many African American students who feel the need to be accepted by their peer group will shy away from appearing to desire academic achievement, and act in the manner of the peer group. Some students will purposely get lower grades or fail a course altogether, yell at teachers, and have little, if any, regard for authority— all in the name of "acting Black." (Bolton, 2002)

If the "Acting White" syndrome is so widely recognized as a factor in the low achievement of minority students, why then can it not be eradicated? Fordham and Ogbu suggest that the "Acting White Syndrome" is part of the predominant Black culture and will be virtually impossible to eliminate. Low school performance is an adaptive response to the requirements of cultural imperatives within their community (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). African Americans' community structures have often traditionally included substandard schooling, which, in some cases, includes irrelevant subject matter (i.e. British Literature, European History), government

funded housing and a feeling of educational uselessness when entering the job market. The latter characteristic is seen through the parents of some minority groups. Even when having the “right credentials”—a good education— the parents of these students reached a job ceiling. They were not given access to jobs, wages and other benefits commensurate with their academic accomplishments (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). This leaves African Americans discouraged about the role of academic achievements and success in life.

#### Socioeconomic

Socioeconomic factors have also been shown to have a powerful impact on children and families. In general, youth who live in poverty are more likely to experience socioemotional, behavioral, academic and health difficulties (McLoyd, 1990, 1998). Poverty rates among United States children are one-third higher than they were two decades ago, and are 1.5 to 4 times as high as the rates for children in Canada and Western Europe (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn and Smith, 1998). Moreover, research has shown that economic conditions can influence children both directly through the resources that economic conditions can afford, and indirectly by causing parental distress and consequently impaired parenting (Conger, et. al., 1992). The problems related to socioeconomic factors are exacerbated by the movement of resources, jobs and people from central city to suburb has resulted a hostile environment for children, families and institutions embedded in the cities, including schools. Inequalities in education have developed because of that movement. Simply put, these inequalities—social classes—develop as a result of movement out of the inner city and into the suburbs based on economic ability. Inner-city schools are increasingly the schools of these remnant populations and communities trapped by their economic disability and irrelevance.

Information on inner-city schools is most helpful in analyzing the academic performance of students at NHHS. Overall, students from homes with low SES traditionally perform lower academically than those from middle or high-level income homes. In homes where the parents' education is higher, typically the parents place a high premium on the academic achievement of their children. This is not to say, however, that parents that have a low SES do not value education. The paradox is that Black and low-SES students often have positive attitudes and beliefs about education, but on average low achievement. Research has shown that global attitudes about schooling are abstract and adhere to some subjective positive ideology of American education. Concrete attitudes about education, in contrast, are objective and adhere to material realities. (Wilson, 1997). When concrete attitudes about education are assessed, the attitude/achievement discrepancy disappears (Wilson, 23). Students from low-income homes may want to achieve academically, and in most cases have the ability to do so, however, the problem comes from parents who do not see how the inclusion in Advanced Placement courses would help their child. Emerson Elliot, U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics, in 1994 attributed to social scientists the belief that "much of the minority/White differences in achievement [is due] to the higher incidence of poverty in the families of minority children." (Elliot, 1994, p.17)

Socioeconomic status also affects enrollment in AP courses. The College Board charges fees for taking and scoring the AP exam. In 2000, the College Board generated 76 billion dollars in test fees. However, the U.S. Department of Education this year has increased spending from \$15 million from \$2 million in 1997 for a program that helps low-income students pay the \$76 test

fee (College Board, 2000). Many students from low-income families are aware of the AP fees, but not aware of any financial assistance, and do not apply for AP classes because of the fees.

Socioeconomic status does not only hinder minority students from entering into AP classes, it also affects overall achievement. Charles V. Willie analyzed the Charleston County School District in South Carolina to show the number of minorities in poverty-stricken schools compared to affluent schools. The conclusion of the study showed that few White students in Charleston County were exposed to the liabilities (and assets, if any) of receiving an education in a poverty- concentrated school and few Black students are exposed to the asset (and liabilities, if any) of receiving an education in an affluent-concentrated school (Willie, 1997). The following table further summarizes Willie's findings.

Table 1.

Number and Proportion of Black and White Students in Schools of Varying Socioeconomic Status, Charleston County School District, 1997

Socioeconomic Characteristic Of School	Schools		Black		White		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Poverty Concentrated	27	45	10,464	51	874	7	11,338	35
Socioeconomically mixed	24	40	8,753	43	7,465	62	16,218	50
Affluent Concentrated	9	15	1,169	6	3,826	31	4,995	15
Total	60	100	20,386	100	12,165	100	32,551	100

(Willie, 1998, p. 19)

What is most striking about these data is the number of Black students in poverty concentrated schools as compared to whites. As Table 1 shows, there are 44% more Black students than white in these types of schools. As Willie's findings suggest, in these schools, advanced and AP classes are minimal, and even though these are high minority schools, minority participation is low.

What is of even more concern is that, in most cases, the more poverty stricken the school, community, or districts are, the fewer number of AP or advanced courses the school can offer. Evidence is also given in Table Two that shows how the socioeconomic characteristics of the school affected the achievement levels of Black and White students.



Table 2

Proportion of Black and White Students Scoring Above the National Norm on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) by Socioeconomic School Type, Charleston County School District, 1997

	<b>Schools</b>		<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>
<b>Socioeconomic Characteristic Of School</b>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Poverty Concentrated</b>	27	45	23	59
<b>Socioeconomically mixed</b>	24	40	31	65
<b>Affluent Concentrated</b>	9	15	50	79
<b><i>Total</i></b>	60	100	29	65

(Willie, 1998, p. 19)

Table Two clearly shows a smaller percentage of Black students performed above the national norm on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, when compared to White students. In the poverty concentrated schools 36% more White students scored above the national norm than Black students. The smallest difference occurred in the affluent concentrated schools. In those schools, 50% of the Black students scored above the national norm, compared to 79% of the White students. This was a difference of only 29%.

There are other areas that are affected by students' socioeconomic status as well. For example, a study conducted by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company examined variations by income level, in the attitudes of students, teachers, and administrators. The study concluded that students from low income families are less likely to report that their principal cares about all the students in the school, makes the school a safe place, that their school is helping prepare them for the future or that their teachers encourage them very much to do their best (Fauth, Gravitch and Markow, 2001). In addition, low-income students are three times more likely than high-income students to report that they have difficulty paying attention in school because of worries at home.

In short, students' socioeconomic status will definitely impact their academic career. Data show us that the more financially stable a student's household is, the more educational opportunities can be made available to him or her. Students that do not come from financially stable homes may have to contribute to the household income by working afterschool—well into the night in some cases. These students will not only find it difficult to cope with the rigors of an AP course, but their overall achievement will be affected as well.

## Selection Processes

In addition to the “Acting White Syndrome” and socioeconomic factors, another key issue is the methods that are used to select students for AP courses. The criteria can vary from AP class to AP class, school to school, or district to district. Students are able to sign up for these classes, but that does not necessarily mean they will gain admittance. This is because, in many schools, after students sign up for the classes, they have to go through a screening to see if the school’s AP criteria are met. If they do not meet the specific criteria, they are not admitted to the class. Disproportionately low placement of minority students, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, in more challenging curricula may also stem from the procedures used to identify students as gifted or as eligible for high-level courses. Minority students who are identified as academically or intellectually gifted in the earlier grades are more likely to be enrolled in more advanced courses in high school. Excessive reliance on end-of course test scores may narrow the ranges of students considered for placement, particularly in schools in which rigid cut off scores are employed as a means of selection (Darity, et.al, 2001)

Should test scores alone be the deciding factor for a student to take an AP class? If so, and if minority test scores remain constant, there will continue to be a low minority enrollment in these classes. Some educators have argued for a more expanded identification process including:

- Psychometric information from various sources (e.g. creativity and achievement tests as well as IQ test, etc.
- Developmental information from teachers, parents, and the student (via rating scales, personal narratives, and/or teacher recommendations).
- Peer Nominations or Peer Ratings

- Academic performance information such as grades and accomplishments in school and non-school settings (Morgan, 1989).

North Carolina has made strides to change the identification process of academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) students (Darity, et.al, 2001). Instead of using the traditional screening and identification process of standardized assessments for AIG placement, schools are developing multiple identification criteria so that no one criterion excludes a student from admission to gifted programs. A small increase in ethnic minority representation has been noted, but to date, a significant overall increase has not yet been achieved during the first three-year cycle of implementation of these plans (Darity et.al, 2001).

Nationally, there has been a movement to attract more minority students from the “regular” academic program into AP programs. The Advanced Placement program has been seen as an “elitist” or exclusive program by parents and students on both sides. A large number of students feel that they are not smart enough to handle the rigors of the programs. There has been national funding for attracting students into the program. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley has stated, “At a time when we need to encourage all students to aim higher, AP courses motivate students to master challenging materials and perform at the highest levels. There has to be aggressive advertising of the AP program in order to attract all segments of a school community.” (Shnaiberg, 1995) Riley’s recommendation notwithstanding, such “aggressive advertising” is often not present. For instance, some schools advertised their open-access policy by word of mouth, a system that tended to work better for White students than for minorities (Viadero, 2002). Blacks and Hispanics also have complained that teachers and guidance counselors discourage them from taking advanced classes, and in some cases, refused to allow

them to enroll (Viadero, p. 6). Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois is dedicated to opening the program to all of its students. At Stevenson, the idea is that every student is a potential AP kid, or at least could be. Last year about 52 percent of the school's graduating seniors had at least one AP course on their transcript, a percentage that has been moving up in the last five years since the school abandoned the notion of AP as an exclusive program (Sadowski, 2000).

As shown in the literature, there is no consistency in the AP selection process. Test scores generally are used to determine whether or not a student will be successful in an AP class, however the determination is not always accurate. For example, students who do well in World History may not excel in AP United States History. This type of determination is comparable to using SAT scores, solely, to determine the success of a person entering college.

#### Teacher Expectations and Perceptions

The expectations that teachers have for their students can also be a factor in widening or narrowing the achievement gap and the number of minority students in AP and advanced classes. Teachers tend to have lower expectations for minority and low income students than for other students (Hale-Benson, 1986). According to Ferguson, teachers perceive that young Black students are less willing to put forth effort to succeed academically. As students get older, teachers begin to perceive more similarity in the level of academic effort that White and Black students put forth (Ferguson, 1998). Sadly, the early perception that Black students put forth less effort can affect the students' entire educational experience. Ferguson also feels that low – performing Black students may be perceived as more difficult than low performing White students, and as a result, receive less teacher support. “Difficult” students may be a hassle and

distraction for teachers. Rather than spend their time attending to “trouble-makers”, teachers might prefer to spend time teaching students whom they perceive to be willing and interested in learning (Ferguson, 1998). Students that are deemed underachieving may not actually be underachieving if teachers who are not objective or sensitive to different cultures are defining what underachievement means. Such teachers are less likely to refer minority students for gifted education services, and when students do not have access to appropriate education, they have difficulty reaching their potential.

Interestingly, a study was conducted in 2001 that included information about teacher/student perceptions and expectations. In this study a nationally representative sample of 2,049 public school students in grades 7-12 were interviewed (Fauth, Gravitch, and Markow, 2001). One of the survey questions asked teachers and principals in heavily minority -populated schools about their expectations for their students. The findings were dramatic.

- Teachers and principals whose schools have more than two-thirds minority students are less likely than those with one-third or fewer students to believe that teachers in their school have high expectations for all students (teachers, 40% vs. 52%; principals, 53 % vs. 70 %).
- Teachers and principals in schools with more than two-thirds minority students are less likely to report that learning and education is valued by students in their school (teachers, 14% vs. 26%; principals, 38% vs. 47%).
- Teachers in schools with more than two-thirds minority students are less likely than those in schools with one-third or fewer minority students to report that all or most of their students will achieve their full academic potential for this school year (59% vs. 76%). (Fauth, Gravitch and Markow, p. 89)

There have been attempts by various school districts to change the way teachers, students, and administrators perceive each other. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, the school district has instituted workshops on diversity and multiculturalism. They found that Black students had more negative relationships with teachers than White students (Galley, 2000). In response, the district instituted diversity training for the staff, changed the curriculum to include more content on contributions of people of color, and changed discipline policies to reduce the practice of treating Black students more harshly than their White counterparts (Galley, 27).

One of the programs instituted in the Fort Wayne, Indiana School District was Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA). This program trains teachers to interact with students on a more equitable basis. It is designed to help teachers remove the idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy—what you expect from the student is what the student gives you. Some of the goals of TESA are to:

- sensitize teachers to their expectations of all students
- show how expectations affect student learning
- involve teachers in reflection and careful, attentive practice of new behaviors.
- help teachers practice talking more to low-achievers, in and out of class.
- encourage teachers to ask more questions to students who may normally be quiet in class.

(Hawley, 1997)

As this chapter has shown, the research identifies a variety of factors that cause low-achievement in students. These factors also contribute to the low minority enrollment in AP classes. The “Acting White Syndrome” plays an important role because it is fairly common within the minority communities and may be a mechanism to socially survive in those

communities. Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu's research clearly shows the correlation between low academic performance and social acceptance. In my own conversations with random minority students, as discussed in the next chapter, they have further substantiated the "Acting White Syndrome". Two students that are in AP classes stated that many times peers accuse them of "acting White" because they take AP classes, use grammatically correct English, and have Black *and* White friends. These students decided to continue in their AP classes and deal with the attitudes of other Black students.

Low income is another determinant in whether students enroll in AP classes, and in their overall academic achievement. Income plays a role in parental involvement. Parents that are struggling to make ends meet tend to be less involved with their child's academic success or failure. Students from low income homes may need to work afterschool to help support the family rather than spend extra time working on Advanced Placement assignments that usually require additional time outside of the classroom. These students may be more inclined to take on-level classes which allow for them to complete assignments at school, or that have minimal homework assignments. The number of AP classes a school offers also is contingent on the type of students it serves. As seen in the Charleston, South Carolina School District, there are a high number of minority students enrolled in poverty schools. These students also score less than their affluent counterparts on standardized tests. Since these schools are less affluent than others, the number of academic opportunities—AP classes are limited.

The way students are selected for AP classes will also determine the number of minorities in these classes. AP admission requirements vary across school districts, so there is no one set of criteria for admission. In some schools, however, parental consent is required before any student



can participate in an AP class. If minority parental involvement is low due to low income, then getting minority parents to consent to admission into an AP class that has a \$76 testing fee may be virtually impossible.

Lastly, and probably the most important factor in low minority enrollment in AP classes is teacher perception and expectations. The research clearly shows that there are differences in the way Black and White students perceive their educational environment. Again, in speaking with two Black students here at New Hanover, one reason they gave for such a low number of minority students in AP course was that many feel that they would not be treated fairly in their classes. The feeling of inequity proves to be a barrier that keeps capable students out of challenging classes.

## CHAPTER TWO

As shown in the first chapter, the research literature acknowledges that minority students are not adequately represented in Advanced Placement courses, and most of that research gives reasons for the misrepresentation. However, hardly any studies give a solution to this ever-growing problem. Out of the reasons for low minority enrollment in AP classes suggested in chapter one—socioeconomic factors, teacher perception and expectations, the Acting White Syndrome, and selection processes—the only one that has been reported in the research was teacher perception and expectations—and even its treatment was superficial.

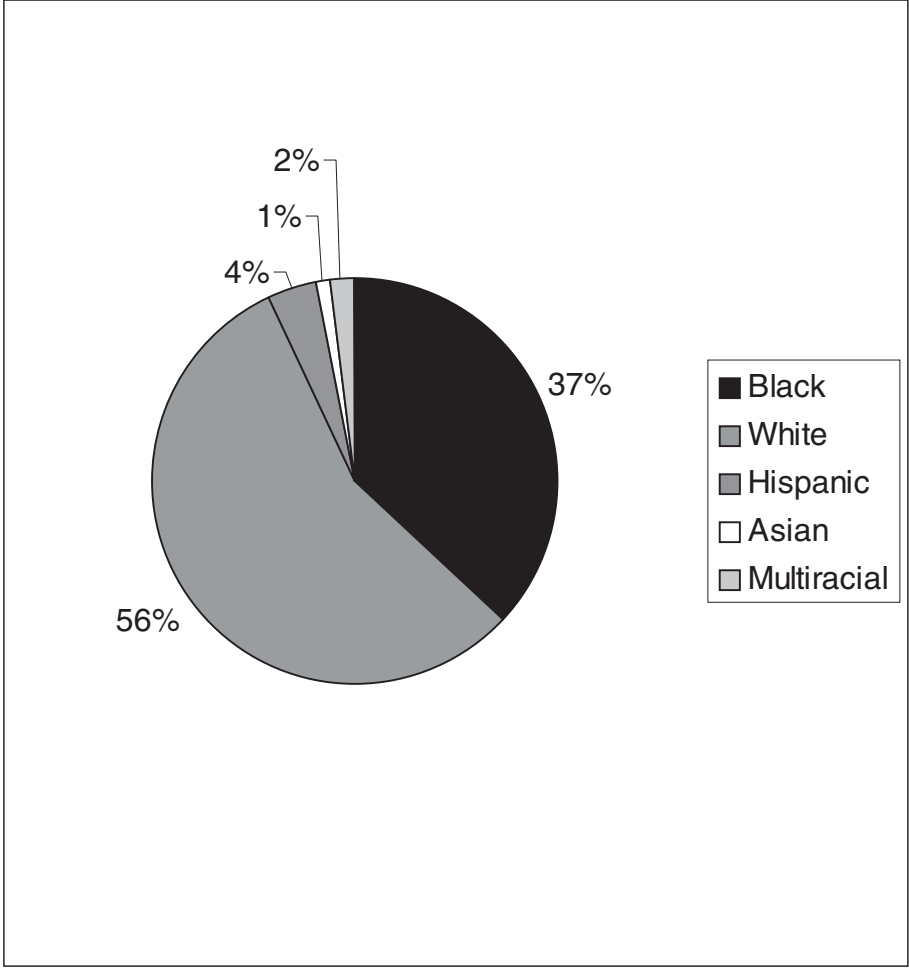
Teacher Expectation Student Achievement (TESA) has been one program to address problems of the “self-fulfilling” prophecy that some teachers and administrators may have toward some students. Many school districts have implemented this strategy to increase minority student achievement. As noted in the first chapter, TESA trains teachers to interact with students—particularly minority students—on a more equitable basis. It also teaches teachers to ask themselves whether or not they have the same expectations for all students.

This program is to be commended for its efforts to create equity among all students and foster an environment conducive to learning, but the program only addresses one facet of low minority enrollment in Advanced Placement classes. Furthermore, there are no data to show that TESA has encouraged more minority students to participate in AP courses. What TESA has done in the Fort Wayne, Indiana School District, according to Superintendent Thomas Fowler-Finn, is close the gap between the way minority students saw their environment and the way the majority students saw their environment. (Sadowski, 2000)

It appears from the literature that educators are aware that there is a problem with low minority enrollment in AP classes, but there have been no attempts to directly remedy it; or, if there have been, no convincing research on the subject has been published.

Locally, the problem pervades and has persisted for a number of years. New Hanover County School Administrators have been trying to close the achievement gap between White and minority students for a number of years. New Hanover High School, in particular, is not exempt from this problem and because of the lack of programs and data that directly address this problem the problem may persist. NHHS serves 1,464 students. As Table 3 (below) shows, of these students there are 546 Blacks (37%), 54 Hispanics (4%), 14 Asians (1%) and 25 multiracial students (2%). NHHS also serves many students that live in or near low-income housing projects such as Taylor Homes, Rankin Terrace, and Houston Moore. There are 556 students on free or reduced lunch, and of these 380 students are Black, 146 are White, and 30 are Hispanic. NHHS also has an academic track called The Lyceum. Students apply to this program at the end of their sophomore year, having completed the prerequisite courses. If accepted, they complete their core courses for their junior and senior years in the program, which is housed in another part of the school. All of the core classes are AP courses. The classes begin at 7:30 a.m., so the students have to provide their own transportation. After 11:40, the students take their elective courses with the rest of the students at the school. (Although not mentioned in the research literature there may be a direct correlation between transportation issues and low minority enrollment in AP classes at New Hanover High School.)

Figure 1 -New Hanover High School Racial Breakdown

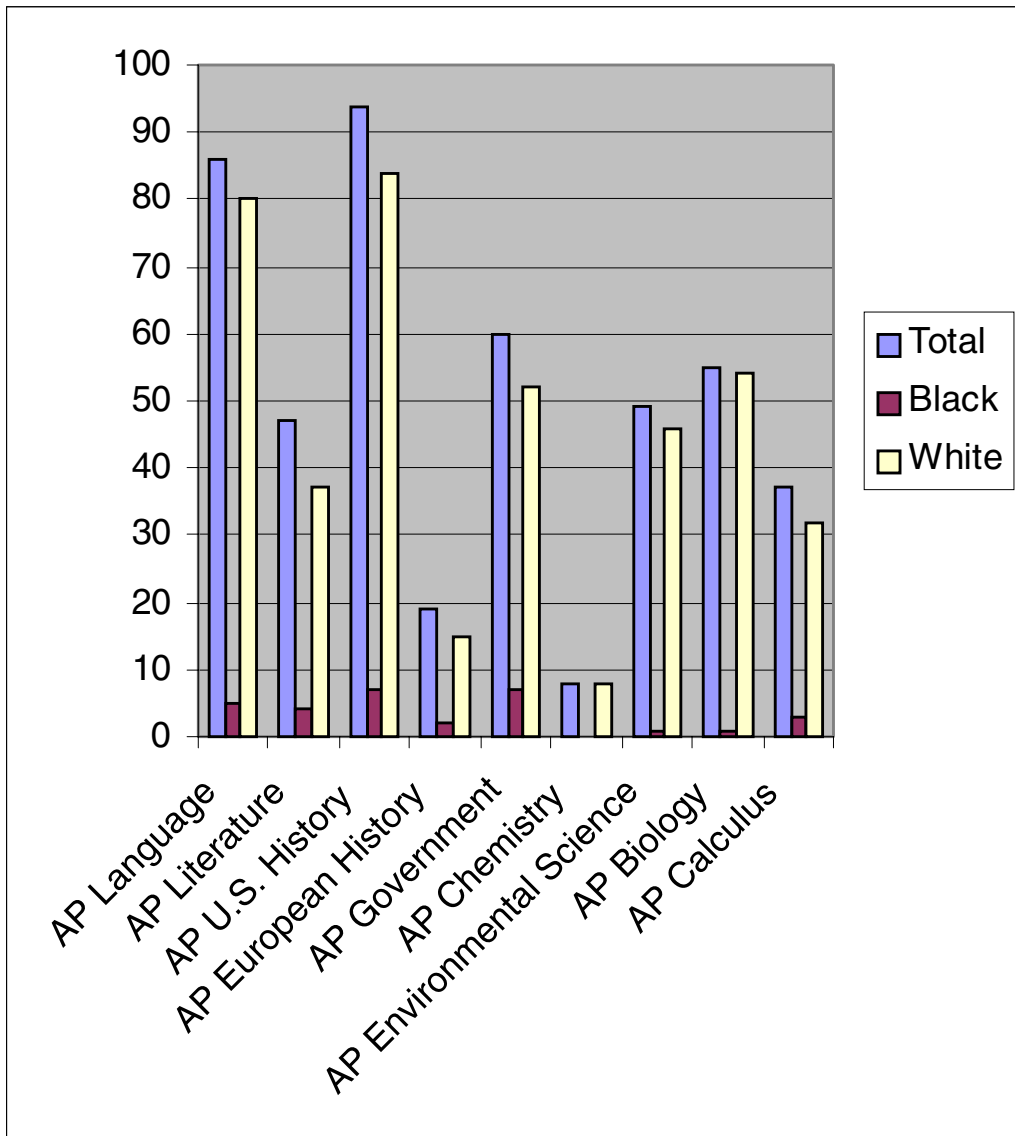


Based on NHHS Student Information Management System Data: 2002-2003

There are nine Advanced Placement courses offered at NHHS and 16 Black students are taking one or more of these courses—less than one percent of the total number of Black students. As Table Four shows, there is a need for a program to increase the minority enrollment in these classes. In this data, the disparity in the number of Black and White students taking AP classes is staggering. For example, the total number of students enrolled in AP Environmental Science is 49, and of these, 48 are White while only one is Black. In AP Chemistry, all eight of the students enrolled are White. AP U.S. History has the highest number of Black students—seven. However, this pales in comparison to the 84 White students enrolled in that class.

Figure 2 -AP Course Profile by Race

Based on NHHS Student Information System Management 2002-2003



## Methodology of Student Interviews

To address this problem at NHHS, and because of the weak or non-existent guidance from the research base, the school's administration (the author included) decided to gather its own information and its own guidance from those most affected by this situation: the students. In these interests, two groups of students were selected and interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of why some minorities enrolled in AP classes and why others did not. Both groups, because of this study's focus, consisted of minority students only. The first group consisted of eight students who are currently enrolled in AP courses. The purpose of the interviews was to determine if the reasons for low minority enrollment in AP classes that arose from the review of literature aligned with the students' responses. The second interviews included a group of eight students who were not taking any AP courses. Students included a mix of family incomes and achievement levels. Since this is the target group, they were asked many of the same questions as the first group, and additional questions were asked to delve deeper into their thoughts about not only AP classes, but the Lyceum Program as well.

In conducting the interviews, several themes emerged. The students all talked in some form about fear of failing AP classes and being looked upon as dumb; lack of motivation to do the work; teacher and personal expectations; acting White; the lack of information about the AP program; and, in some cases, the financial burden associated with taking AP classes, or being in an AP track like the Lyceum. It should be noted that each student did not respond to every question, and as will be shown later, some students were very outspoken and responded frequently. The first set of responses, immediately following this section, is from students currently enrolled in AP courses. I include the exact wording of the questions posed to each group of students.

## Acting White

**Have any of you been accused of trying to act White by any of your peers who do not excel academically or do not take AP courses?**

**Student B:**

“Well, just to give a little background, I’ve been in advanced classes or what not since the fourth grade. But anyway, since then a lot of students, or whatever, that are in regular classes or don’t get to go to whatever it’s called in elementary school...umm...AG, will sit there and be like, ‘Uh, huh I see you’re in AG or whatever, and I guess you’re supposed to be smart. You think you’re better than somebody? And I was like, ok, you could be in these classes just like me. And many of them would say, ok, she’s in the class with a whole bunch of White folk, so she must be White, and stuff like that. It was a lot stronger when I was in elementary school, but now it’s not that bad because a lot of kids respect me more now because I can help them out with a lot of stuff. But in general it was a lot worse in elementary school.”

**Student C:**

“I would have to agree. It was a lot tougher in elementary and middle school than it is now, because now they realize how smart you are, and its not that you just want to be with the White people. And for me you know I don’t think it has to do with friends, you know, that are lazy, and like, take lower classes. Some people just see me as trying to be White because I’m in the AP classes. I just tell them no, straight up no, that I am doing this for me I want to have a good education.”

Students B and C both have been exposed to accelerated classes since elementary school. It is striking to find that there was more peer ridicule in elementary school than high school. Student B also supports the perception that non-AP students have about being associated with Whites.

Since student B was in classes with a majority of Whites, he was accused of being White simply by association.

**Student G:**

“I’m accused of being White all the time because. Basically because I care about my education and what I do after high school, and the fact that I want to go to college. I want to be sitting behind a desk with a suit and tie, you know, I don’t want to be digging ditches or something like that. And I think that most Black high school students are ignorant because they associate intelligence with being White.”

One of the major symptoms of the “Acting White Syndrome” is associating academic excellence with being White. Student G has clearly articulated his ideal work setting, and



realizes that it can only be obtained through hard academic work. He also expresses disdain for those Black students that associate intelligence with being White.

**Student D:**

“I’ve been called White girl a lot in my lifetime, ever since I was in elementary school. At one point in elementary school I stopped—period—I made lower grades just so they would stop calling me White. But now if someone calls me a name just because I want to achieve higher, that’s my motivation to do more. Of course I would have to say that it’s pretty ignorant to do that, I mean especially from what Lyceum minorities are called. We’re always looked down upon. Sometimes, though, kids will try to take advantage of you, you know, when I take electives outside of Lyceum, they’re like, ‘You’re smart you can help me with this’.

Student D, at one time, went through what some academically talented Black students often go through. She decided to make lower grades so other Black students would stop harassing her about being White. Some Black students do this in order to fit in with other Black students in their peer groups. It was also interesting to hear that non-AP students will try to take advantage of the AP students to help them with assignments, even though they do not acknowledge them socially.

Another feature in the “Acting White Syndrome” is having a grasp on the correct use of the English language. This is reflected in the comments of Student H.

**Student H:**

“I know I’ve dealt with that a lot through middle school because I was in SAGE and AG classes. Ever since elementary school I’ve been in the higher moving classes, and so once my speech started developing, I spoke more advanced than my peers. I didn’t use all the slang as they did, and so I was accused of being White a lot just because of the way I spoke. I used proper English and said things the way they were supposed to be said.”

**What are some so-called “characteristics” of acting White?**

**Student G:**

“Intelligence and speaking properly are two of the most prevalent among high school students.”

**Student C**

“To add to that, skin color too. Like the lighter the skin you are the more they are going to pick on you and accuse you of being White.”

Again, these respondents are currently enrolled in AP classes. In speaking with these students, they shed some light on the aforementioned reasons for low minority enrollment in AP classes. During the interviews, the students appeared to really focus on the “Acting White Syndrome.” Even though all of the students did not respond during the interviews, afterwards they all had additional information to give about how other students perceive them as being White. Student D was very vocal in explaining how the constant name-calling by other Black students prompted her to intentionally stop making good grades in elementary and middle school. Student G felt that the “Acting White Syndrome” was a cultural problem and would very difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. However, all students felt that this was a major problem that kept minority students from enrolling in AP classes. One can be sure that there are many students that did not have the fortitude to endure such criticism and succeed academically. The comparison of each group’s responses is striking. The following questions and responses are from the non-AP students.

**Do you or any of your friends that don’t take AP classes see students that do take AP classes as acting White?**

**Student A:**

“Yes. I don’t know, I guess it’s the stuff they teach them or they think they are higher than us, so they gotta act more proper.”

This non-AP student felt that acting proper (i.e. correct speech, few, if any, discipline referrals, and manners) was a characteristic of the Black AP students whom they perceived as “acting White.” In order to be “true to the race,” many Black students feel the need to know and use the latest slang, and adhere to the dress of the Hip-Hop music culture. Conversely, Student B had a different perception of the Black students enrolled in AP classes.

**Student B:**

“No. I just see it as them being a little smarter than the rest of us.”

**Student C:**

“I have a friend that’s like that...um, he changes. It just depends on who he’s around.”

**Give me some characteristics of acting White.**

**Student F:**

“Basically, their voice sounds different. It sounds...corny (Laughs). Their voices just sound...and the way they dress and stuff like that I mean...”

**Student E:**

“Everything they say has to be like a complete sentence, they speak all proper and they be saying them hard words and they be all long, like ten letters and stuff.”

Again the proper use of the English language seems to be a recurring characteristic of “acting White” for the non-AP students. The students, in their responses, find what they are saying very funny. They all laughed as they gave their responses about characteristics of acting White.

**Student C:**

Umm they use certain words that come from a different nationality like ‘dude’ and ‘cool’ (laughs). They use those like more than six times in one sentence.”

**When you hear of the Lyceum program here at NHHS, what are some things that come to mind?**

**Student H:**

“White people. A whole bunch of White people who come to school earlier than anybody else and they have different classes that are higher, like AP classes.”

**Student B:**

“A group of people way smarter than I’ll ever be.”

In comparing some of the students from both groups, Student G in the AP group and Student E in the non-AP group did come to the same conclusion on acting White. Both felt that speaking proper English was a major characteristic of acting White. Student E, in the non-AP group essentially went on to say that Black students that try to act White speak in complete sentences and use multi-syllabic words.

## Teacher Perceptions

The AP students also validated other reasons given in Chapter One for low minority enrollment in AP classes. This group touched on teacher perception and expectations. This group of minority students felt that their AP teachers did not have the same expectations for them as they did their White counterparts.

### **Did any of your teachers encourage to take, or discourage you from taking AP classes?**

#### **Student B:**

“...Umm, most of my teachers have recommended me to take AP classes because of my determination.”

#### **Student D:**

“My teachers have recommended me for AP classes because they always say they want to increase the minority numbers in the classroom, and they feel that you are determined and that you will be able to pull it off. But I’ve never had a teacher discourage me from joining an AP class.”

#### **Student C:**

“It wasn’t till I applied for the Lyceum that teachers encouraged me to take AP classes. But before then, no, none of the teachers—they didn’t say no—but they didn’t say anything at all.”

### **Do you feel that your teachers have a high expectation of you?**

#### **Student A:**

“The AP classes that I’m in, they’re not balanced in there. So like one teacher is, she’s like expecting more and the other is like slacking off like he doesn’t know what he’s doing.”

#### **Student H:**

“I agree with student A. In the AP classes that I’m taking the teacher doesn’t complain when you don’t do work because she feels that you need this, and you need to have your own personal goals. She’ll explain to you that this is like college and you gotta be mature enough and do your work because if you don’t you’re not gonna pass. And she raises the bar higher than normal high school expectations and she expects you to reach that and she doesn’t bring it any lower.”

Students A and H give the impression that their AP teachers expect them to work hard and excel simply because they are in an AP class. As with all AP classes, the academic standard is raised and students are expected to meet and exceed that standard. However, the following

students had a different opinion on what the expectations were like for them when asked if their teachers had a high expectation for them.

**Student D:**

“I would have to say yes and no. In one of my classes, the teacher, she’s a great teacher, but when you make a “C” on a test its like ‘great job, great job!’, but compared to someone else in the class who is not my color and make the C, it’s like ‘Well, I know you can do better’. But when I make a C it’s like ooh that was great! But when the student of a different color makes the same grade, she’s like, ‘What happened? Maybe you need to stick around so I can go over this with you.’ That’s just in that class.

**Student E:**

“I agree. As a Black person, I feel that if I get an A on a test in AP Earth/Environmental Science I get a lot of praise for it, like it was shocking that I would do that good or that it was unexpected. But if I do bad, like I get a C minus or something like that, I get just as much praise, but it seems like that was expected of me, and if somebody else does good, like a White person, I get more attention because it seems like I’m not supposed to be doing that and the White person is supposed to be doing that.”

This group of minority students felt that their AP teachers did not have the same expectations for them as for their White counterparts. Students D and E felt that their teachers were content with them making C’s, while they often told White students in the same class that they could do better. The students said they felt that their teachers did not expect them to achieve on the same level as their White students. They did admit, however, that the teachers did not blatantly show they had lower expectations from them. They were not rude or condescending, but the students quickly recognized the differences.

When the non-AP minority students were asked about teacher/family perceptions, they responded differently from the AP students, as shown below.

**Have any of your teachers recommended you for AP classes?**

**Student D:**

“I was supposed to take an advanced class, but I got out. On the first day of class...she had on the board all the work we were going to do and she asked the class if they could handle it, but she was only looking me, so I decided to get out of the class.”

Sadly, this appears to be an obvious overt attempt to “weed out” students that the teacher felt would not be able to handle the rigors of an advanced class. The student felt that the teacher was singling her out simply because she was a minority

**Have any of your parents or relatives expressed an interest in you taking AP classes?**

**Student E:**

“Yeah, but I don’t want to do it so she say that she think I’m smart, that I can do it and make A’s, but I don’t think I can so I don’t take the class.”

**Student H:**

“My parents have asked me to take advanced classes and Lyceum, but they know that I’m not up for the challenge. So it’s like they ask once, but don’t ask again because they know I won’t do it.”

In these cases, Students E and H never explicitly say that they are not capable of handling the classes. They simply do not feel the need to put forth any effort to take them. It is also interesting that even though the parents of Student H encourage her to take the class, she refuses because she is “not up for the challenge.”

**Student F:**

“My mom wanted me to take advanced classes, but I heard they were kind of hard so I didn’t take them.”

**Student C:**

“Yes, but I really don’t have the time. I’m working almost every afternoon, and then getting up early and coming to school.”

**Do your teachers have a high academic expectation of you?**

**Student H:**

“I think my teachers have a high expectation for the work, but they know that I can do better than what I really am doing, and they complain about it every once in a while. But you know, I’m not trying and they know I’m not going to try.”

**Student B:**

“No. I mean it’s like they teach me, and if you don’t get it it’s up to you. If you don’t want to get it and you don’t want to learn it, then it’s on you—they don’t care.”

**Student E:**

“My teachers think I’m dumb anyway. So it really don’t matter...that’s probably why I’m in your office so much (laughs). They act like I don’t even exist sometimes. So why do the work?”

The perceptions of the teachers in both groups are interesting. The non-AP students that replied seemed to feel their teachers did not care about them personally or academically, or in one disturbing case, thought they were dumb. None of the AP students felt that their teachers did not care about them, however, they did feel that their teachers did not have the same expectations for them that they had for the White students in the class.

## Lack of Information

The group of minority AP students felt that the way information about the AP program was gained needed to be improved. Student had never heard of AP classes in middle school or during the freshman year, and said that the whole program should be explained so the students would understand the benefits of taking AP classes. Student D also talked about how the application process for AP courses discouraged students from taking them. Student D felt that there should not be an application process for students who knew they wanted to take AP classes. The point is understood. There is not an application process for on-level or advanced courses, but there is one for AP. Student B felt that there should be an information session, similar to financial aid sessions, held to let students and parents know about the AP program.

**Do you think the minority students in general have knowledge of what the AP program is about?**

**Student D:**

“I’d have to say yes and no. It all depends on how much they are into school. I know a lot of minorities...all of my friends know about the AP classes. I make sure I keep everyone I know informed. But there are some that, you know, pick their classes and they don’t know that you can get college credit. All they know is that it’s a hard class. I guess it all depends on how much a student is into school.”

**Would it be safe to say that your counselors and your teachers have not adequately given the minority population information about the AP program itself?**

**Student D:**

“I would have to say I don’t think they have adequately explained it. You know when they first...when they talk about classes they should do a brief summary on taking an AP class and what the benefits are from it. And, you know, when I was in the ninth or tenth grade I don’t remember them saying...all I remember was advanced or general I never really heard AP or beyond that. So I think there should really be someone, whether it’s a student that has taken AP classes or something. But I think there should be something provided that will let students know about AP classes. I explained the AP program to student C because we are related and I encouraged her to take AP courses. She got more from it from what I said than what she was told about it.” Even the way you sign up for AP courses kinda discourages students, not just Black students, from taking the classes. Here you have to go to the counselors and get an



application form for AP, fill it out turn it back in, and wait for someone to decide if you are good enough to take the class.”

**Student B:**

“I think we should have something like an assembly, like how they have college prep night, college information for seniors, or how they have the Lyceum meeting for sophomores, I think they should do that with AP just one night maybe in the cafeteria for sophomores, juniors and seniors to explain the whole AP process. And I think that would...and we need the minorities out there too...and I think that will give them a general understanding of...it seems that counselors and teachers only want the smartest students in AP classes. There are a lot of kids out there who aren't necessarily super smart students, but they could do alright in an AP class because they are motivated and just need to feel like someone thinks they can do it.”

**How did you become aware of the AP program?**

**Student D:**

“I first heard about AP Euro (European History) in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade but I wasn't sure what it was, and I decided not to join it because I wasn't informed enough. But Lyceum was when I started taking AP classes.”

**Student H:**

“I talked to Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ (counselor) about it because I saw it in the, umm, student curriculum book.”

**Student B:**

“I first heard about it when I was probably about nine years old. My brother and sisters knew about them and took them when they were in high school, and when I got to high school they encouraged me to take the classes.”

Information, then, is a contributing factor in low minority enrollment in AP classes, generally.

Most of the information they had was from what they heard other students talk about. As an extreme example, one of the students did not even know what an AP class was. In addition, students had only partial or inaccurate information.

**Do you know any information about the AP program?**

**Student A:**

“Like if you make a B you actually get an A in the class, like it will go up a grade.”

**Student C:**

“I heard the credits are counted differently.”

**Student G:**

“I think it's counted sort of like a college credit, instead of a regular credit.”

**Student D:**

“If you take them and pass, you are more likely to get accepted into a college.”

It is obvious the non-AP students have very limited information on the AP Program. It appears that the information they do have is from those who have taken AP classes, or from overhearing others talk about it and misconstruing the information.

One potential source of information (or misinformation) about AP classes is, of course, guidance counselors. As such, I asked students about that connection:

**Have any of your guidance counselors said anything to you about taking AP classes?**

**Student F:**

“No. No one has said anything to me.”

**Student C:**

“Mr. \_\_\_\_\_(counselor) said I should because it would look better on my college form.”

**Student B:**

“My counselor tried to get me to, I signed up for it but then I backed down.”

## Personal Reasons

During the interviews, the non-AP students revealed a variety of different personal reasons for not taking AP classes. Some of these reasons dealt with perceived notions of stress, not wanting to be the only minority in the class, and an increased workload.

### **Why haven't any of you signed up for AP classes before?**

#### **Student B:**

"Because you don't want the stress...you already know you got stress from other classes so you don't want to take stress off of advanced classes."

#### **Student F:**

"Because you're scared you might fail the class or whatever...you know you might think it's harder than a regular class and you might fail it so..."

#### **Student B:**

"...and your friends ain't in there and you'll be, like he said, the only Black person in the class."

#### **Student E:**

"I was supposed to take AP Chemistry, but I didn't want to."

### **Is there a difference between you and other Black students that have signed up for AP classes?**

#### **Student F:**

"No. There's not a difference at all."

#### **Student H:**

"Some of them are like smarter."

#### **Student D:**

"There is no difference. They just apply themselves more."

#### **Student C:**

"Most of their parents are real strict, and make sure they do their homework and everything. Most of the time they come from different neighborhoods."

#### **Student B:**

"They have, I guess, older people, sisters or mothers they can get help from. If they have problems with advanced classes they can get the help they need."

**Do any of you have friends that are currently taking AP classes?**

**Student B:**

“ I have a sister in Lyceum and another friend that take an advanced class.”

**Student H:**

“My sister is also in Lyceum.”

**If you had a couple of your closest friends to sign up for AP classes, would you be more likely to sign up for them also?**

**Student A:**

“Yes I would take it because I would see it being more of a challenge, and then I got people there to support me, and like, we could go and study together, or I won’t be there by myself, and people won’t look down on me because I’m Black.”

**Student B:**

“Yes I would take the class, because I would have people that would help me and study with me, and I know I could help them. By us being in the same class, we could help each other, and it’s more of a challenge to do better than the other White people in the class.”

The AP group felt that one of the reasons more minorities did not enroll in AP classes was because of a lack of motivation. They did not generalize that all minorities lacked motivation—only the ones with whom they had frequent contact. Yet, as these students’ comments indicate, lack of motivation was only one of a number of reasons for low minority enrollment. Still, as the following comments indicate, those misperceptions linger among the AP students

**What is the difference between you and other Black students who choose not to take AP courses? Or are there any differences?**

**Student C:**

“Basically what I see around school is that it doesn’t matter about AP, it’s like the students—the Black students—they just don’t care about school, or at least the ones that I know. Then the ones that actually do care, the reason I see they are not in AP is because they may be afraid of the extra work. The Black people I see are kind of lazy, and when it comes to work they’re like nah maybe not, Ill stay in the regular class.

**Student B:**

“My opinion on that is that some students are scared. They hear AP and they feel that it will be way too hard, and some are just lazy. But some look at the people that are in AP, you know, these are mostly White kids, or those rich White kids that are in Lyceum. That’s why a lot of minorities don’t join Lyceum, because of how they feel about it. You know they feel that they wouldn’t fit in, or not be able to put up with people that wouldn’t treat them right.

**Student G:**

“I think that Black students are scared of the challenge, and they basically just want to take the easy route. If you can graduate from high school without taking an AP class, why take it? They see it as useless. They’re just scared of the challenge.”

## Socioeconomics

The AP group did not identify money, or the lack thereof, as a reason for the low enrollment in AP classes. Only one student responded along that line, and they felt that it was a matter of priority. Student B felt that parents who had their child's best interests in mind would sacrifice things to make sure their child could pay the test fees or any other extras that may go along with taking the class.

**Do you think socioeconomics or finances play a part in the enrollment in AP course because of test fees, extra trips, etc.?**

**Student B:**

“At certain times, yes it does. My mama, if we were still in that situation that we were in, when we first moved here, I know she would be paying for them things, and getting me through those AP classes, whether or not she knew she had money coming in that month. We live paycheck to paycheck, but she would put aside that \$75, if she had to go without. But some families don't see that as a priority. They're just like, I'm going to pay this bill, so you can just take an advanced class so I won't have to pay anything extra.”

The following responses are from non-AP students. Even though only two of them responded to the question, the rest were in agreement with the students that did respond.

**What comes to mind when you hear about the Lyceum Program here at NHHS?**

**Student C:**

“Money. Cause almost everyone in their classes want to go on extra field trips or something, or buy extra books to read for that class. They spend a whole lot more money than they do on regular classes.”

**Student F:**

“Stuck up people. Usually the rich White kids.”

The Lyceum Program, which is an AP track, was seen as a program for smart and rich White kids by the non-AP group. Student C, of the non-AP group, when asked what came to mind when they heard about the Lyceum Program, replied, “Money.” He felt that the parents of these

students were able to provide any extra money needed for enrichment activities and supplemental materials. In addition, since the Lyceum Program begins at 7:30 a.m., students have to provide their own transportation to school. This poses a problem for many students in a low-income family. Student C went on to say that he works most afternoons, and it would be hard to get to school at 7:30 after working until 11p.m.

To get a better feel for what can be done to increase the minority enrollment in AP classes, student input should be taken into consideration. The non-AP group was asked what they felt could be done to enhance the AP program at NHHS.

**What are some suggestions to increase minority enrollment in AP classes?**

**Student A:**

“It depends, because your surroundings have a lot to do with what classes you sign up for. So it’s like, it’s like, you don’t want to be looked on like a nerd or something, that’s probably what it is—like a little geek to sign up for those classes. You just want to be average like any other person.”

**Student B:**

“If the teachers would be willing to tell you what the classes are about, instead of putting a whole bunch of stuff on the board and trying to scare you out of the class, more Black students might take it.”

**Student C:**

“I think if the teachers were more well known and could work with anybody like Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, and won’t so serious all the time, but have a funny side also, that would help.”

Both groups of students addressed what they felt were the reasons for low minority enrollment in AP classes. Neither group was made aware of the reasons before or during the interview. The non-AP students, however, seemed to more freely address the questions. Almost all of them agreed that AP classes and the Lyceum Program were geared for smart White students, and some of the non-AP students felt that Black students that took these classes were acting White. However, none of the students said that they were not capable of taking the AP classes. They either did not want the stress of added work or they did not want to be the only Black person in an AP class. In contrast to the AP students, the majority of non-AP students did see socioeconomics as a factor in low minority enrollment, even though two of the non-AP students had siblings taking AP classes.



To get a better understanding of how New Hanover High School is dealing with low minority enrollment in AP classes, it is best to examine what program(s) are being implemented to remedy the situation. As Chapter Three explains, the major attempt to increase minority enrollment in AP classes is through the AVID Program.

## CHAPTER THREE

Currently New Hanover High School is implementing only one program that may increase minority enrollment in AP courses. The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program, implemented at NHHS this year, is designed to enroll under-served students in post-secondary education and reach under-served students in the middle. These “middle” students are those not identified as underachieving, but not identified high achievers either.

Nationally, AVID serves over 70,000 middle and high school students at 1,500 schools in 21 states and 15 countries ([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org), 2002). AVID is different from other approaches because it has a very high success rate. (It should be noted, however, that the success rate is based on AVID’s own data, and findings from an independent researcher would yield more confidence.) Data collected by the AVID Center have shown the AVID Program to be effective in preparing so-called average students for college ([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org)). Since 1990, 30,000 AVID students have graduated from high school and gone on to a four year college or university ([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org), 2002). Also, through participation in AVID more Blacks are enrolling in post-secondary education at rates that are considerably higher than national averages. Fifty-five percent of the AVID African-American graduates enrolled in four year colleges, while the national average was 33% ([www.avidonline.org](http://www.avidonline.org) , 2002).

At New Hanover High School, AVID students are targeted in our feeder schools, D.C Virgo Middle and Williston Middle. These students’ academic, attendance, and discipline records are reviewed, then they are invited to join the program. Usually students that are selected have grade point averages of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, and have minimal attendance and discipline problems. At New Hanover High School, the AVID Program serves students in grades 9 and 10.

There are currently 42 total AVID students, of whom 25, or 59%, are Black. These students are enrolled in a college preparatory sequence and they also receive an AVID elective in which they receive the academic and motivational support to succeed. During the AVID elective the students receive intensive tutoring by college students on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays and work in collaborative groups using a curriculum focused on writing and inquiry.

On non-tutorial days the students focus on an across-the-curriculum writing sequence and grade level study skills in preparation for college entrance and placement exams.

In North Carolina, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County School District has implemented the AVID program as well. AVID has grown considerably in this school system since it was first started in 1997. In the 1997-1998 school year Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System had only 13 schools using the AVID Program as compared to 41 in the 1998-1999 school year ([www.avidcenter.org](http://www.avidcenter.org)). Since there are no longitudinal data for this school system it is hard to determine the effectiveness of the program for Charlotte-Mecklenburg County. However, longitudinal data have been gathered in Kentucky since 1995, on attendance, pre-college curriculum enrollment, completion of pre-college curriculum, and enrollment in a 2-year or 4-year college or university. The data show that considerable growth occurred in all areas.

Table 3

Kentucky AVID Data

Longitudinal Data	1995-1996 AVID Students	1995-1996 Control Group
Attendance	94%	90%
Enrollment in Pre-College Curriculum	100%	83%
Completion of Pre-College Curriculum	97%	74%
Enrollment in 2-Year or 4-Year College or University	95%	65%

(AVID Awareness Session and Implementation Workshop Data, 2002)

\*The number of students in the survey is not provided. As such, although the reported percentages are impressive, it is hard to know exactly what they mean.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

Although AVID is a start, at NHHS, in addressing low minority enrollment in AP classes, there has to be a renewed effort placed on equipping parents and students with information about the entire AP program. To successfully bring more minorities into these classes, the following steps, as outlined in Table Six, design need to be implemented:

- Target minorities that could excel in AP class
- AP information session
- Elimination of application process
- Development of an AP support group

First of all, to increase minority enrollment in AP classes, minorities will have to be targeted from the beginning of the ninth grade year. This requirement is part of the long-term program design for increasing minority enrollment in AP classes at NHHS. Guidance counselors will focus on students that exhibit responsibility and maturity. These students will be recommended by teachers, administrators and other staff members. This information will also be gained from teachers in the middle schools and from their work ethic at NHHS. These students do not have to be high achievers. They can be taught study skills and develop habits that will allow them to be successful in AP classes in their junior and senior years.

Another way minorities will be targeted in the long-term program design is by going to local churches and advocating for more minority enrollment in AP classes. The principal will make visits to the largest Black churches in the area and give information concerning the low numbers of minority students in AP classes, and urge the parents and relatives of our students to enroll in more AP classes. This will display an act of genuine concern for their students, and also allow

the parents and other relatives of these students to understand the importance of AP classes when determining tuition and possible early college graduation.

Also, the AVID program will continue to be used as a springboard for not only AP classes, but for the Lyceum Program as well. AVID was implemented during the 2002-2003 school year. Since AVID is geared to target the “middle of the road students,” it would be an ideal tool to use in the recruitment of more minorities into AP classes. These are steps that need to be taken during February, which is the time of class registration.

Secondly, in order to effectively communicate what the Advanced Placement Program is about, an information session will be held for parents and students. Letters will be sent home to rising juniors and seniors giving them the date, location, and time of the meeting, and also the school will utilize the phone messaging system to remind the parents and students of the meeting. The meeting will include all responsible parties in the successful implementation of the AP program. The NHHS Guidance Department, UNCW Admissions Director, and former and current AP students will be included in the presentation. In this presentation, the parents and students will be given an overview of the AP program by the guidance department. This will include the beginnings and goals of the program, and also the current AP classes offered at NHHS. The UNCW Admissions Director will give information on what UNCW and other colleges and universities look for when making admissions decisions to show just how much of a difference AP classes can make in gaining admittance to a college or university. Former students will be called upon to give an account of how AP classes benefited them. The AP Program at NHHS has allowed several students to graduate and enter the college of their choice as sophomores, which will save them time and money. Current students will be called upon to

explain the rigors of the program they are currently in. The parents and students should know that the AP Program is rigorous and requires additional time and effort. By having their peers address them about the program, the students will understand the realities of the program better. Furthermore, the guidance department will be asked to give information on the financial assistance that can be given if the students qualify. For some, the AP test fee may determine whether or not their student participates in the AP classes. As noted earlier, many parents and students that see the AP test fee as a burden, may not be aware of financial assistance with the fee.

Thirdly, as part of the program design to enroll more minority students in AP classes, the application process will be eliminated. Historically at NHHS, students who were interested in taking AP classes had to go through an extensive application process. Students usually would have to go to the counseling office and ask for an application. The application asked for the customary demographic information, and for students to procure recommendations from their teachers. The applications would also call for the students' current grade point average. Since the students knew that grade point averages would be used as a determining factor, many of them refused to apply. Eliminating the application process and allowing all students to register for AP courses will increase not only minority enrollment, but enrollment overall.

The last piece to the NHHS AP Program Design will be to develop an Advanced Placement Support Group. As shown in Table Six, the Youth Development Specialist at NHHS will spearhead the group. The group will include AP students and teachers who offer a support network with study sessions, tutoring and non-school activities. These study sessions will be student initiated, but the Youth Development Specialist will schedule meeting places and times.

AP teachers will conduct the tutoring sessions, and monies to pay them will be garnered through a grant. Having a support system in place for AP students will insure that they are successful in their academic endeavors. It may also encourage other students to take AP classes since they know they will have a support group to assist them.



Table 4-

## NHHS Advanced Placement Program Design

<b>PROGRAMS</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSONS</b>	<b>METHOD(S)</b>	<b>PROPOSED TIMELINE</b>
Targeting Minorities for AP Program	Teachers, Guidance Counselors, Principals	Teacher recommendations, Speak to church congregations, AVID Program	February (during time of class registration)
Information Session	Asst. Principal, Guidance Dept, Current and Former AP Students, UNCW Admissions Director	Send letters to and phone parents of potential AP Students	December (prior to class registration)
Open AP Registration	Guidance Dept Chair, Principal	Eliminate AP application process. Allow all students to register for AP classes	Immediately
AP Support Group	Youth Development Specialist	Provide paid tutors (NHHS AP teachers) for AP students	August-Beginning of school year

## CONCLUSION

As noted, attempts to close the achievement gap between White and Black students have been going on for a number of years. Some strides have been made, but research provides no clear-cut way to effectively reduce the gap. By increasing the number of minority students in AP courses, some of the gap will likely be eliminated. Just as there is a gap between White and Black students' achievement levels, there is also a gap in the number of White and Black students enrolled in AP courses.

The review of literature suggests several reasons for this inequity. Researchers Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu suggest the "Acting White Syndrome" as a major factor. For some Black students, excelling academically is seen as acting White or trying to be White. The "Acting White Syndrome" is truly a problem. As student interviews at NHHS have shown, some Black students do feel that proper grammar, manners and academic success are characteristics of being White. How can this perception be eradicated? There is no program or quick-fix to this problem. The "Acting White Syndrome" is purely a cultural phenomena. In order to address the problem properly, the mindset and cultural norms have to change. This change does not happen overnight, or over a few years. A high premium must be placed on education and academic success, not only by Blacks, but by all.

Socioeconomics also plays a part in the reason for the Black-White gap in achievement and the low minority enrollment in AP courses. Data show that students from low-income families perform disproportionately lower in school than students from middle to high-income families. Also students from low-income families often have jobs and work long hours after school to supplement the family's income. As a result, their academic performance often suffers. Minority

enrollment in AP classes is affected by socioeconomics. Students who have after school jobs may devote more time to work than the time needed to excel in an AP class. The students often have to make the decision to supplement the family's income or to take rigorous courses and devote that time to studying. Some low-income parents are reluctant to allow their child to take AP courses because of the test fees associated with them.

Another reason for low minority enrollment in AP classes is the way students are selected for these classes. Usually, admission into AP classes is based on standardized test scores and grade point averages. There are many students, both minority and non-minority that can excel in AP classes, but may not meet the admission requirements. North Carolina has attempted to increase the overall enrollment by changing the way academically and intellectually gifted students are identified. New Hanover High School has also modified the AP application process by allowing all students equal access to those particular classes. An application is no longer needed in order to take AP classes. Now, students simply register for them.

Teacher expectations and perceptions greatly play a role in increasing minority enrollment in AP classes. From interviews with New Hanover High School students, it can be said that teachers have a major influence on what classes minority students register to take. If teachers give students the idea that they can be successful in an AP class, usually that student will take the class. However, the opposite is also true. If a teacher does not believe the student should be in an AP class—for whatever reason—and the student is made aware of this, the student is more likely to either drop the class or fail. Teachers may have students that are in on-level courses who tend to be behavior problems, and never entertain the idea of recommending them to take an AP class. Perhaps the on-level work is not challenging the student enough to keep his or her

interest, which leads to undesirable behaviors in the classroom. Programs such as Teacher Expectation and Student Achievement (TESA) have been implemented to address this problem, and increase the success rate of all students and minorities in particular.

By following the program design provided, New Hanover High School should be able to increase the minority enrollment in AP classes. The program needs to extend into the middle schools to give the rising freshmen a sense of what rigorous coursework is like. In order to adequately address not only the problem of low minority enrollment in AP classes, but the Black-White achievement gap, education must be valued by our society. Educators cannot do it alone. We must enlist the help of all stakeholders in education.

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