

2015

# Parents' Influence on Student Advanced Placement Class Enrollment

Alissa Denise Russell  
*Walden University*

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Alissa D. Russell

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Dr. Kathleen Maury, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Kathleen Van Horn, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. David Bail, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2015

Abstract

Parents' Influence on Student Advanced Placement Class Enrollment

by

Alissa D. Russell

MA, Walden University, 2009

BS, Dallas Baptist University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2015

## Abstract

The Advanced Placement program allows high school students who pass an end of course Advanced Placement exam to receive college credit for college level courses completed during high school. The problem addressed by this project study is that, in the school under study, there is low enrollment in Advanced Placement classes even though many students qualify for these courses. Using a case study research design and collecting qualitative data, this study examined the influence parents have on student course selection. This study followed the theories of Epstein which indicate that involved parents positively influence their children's academic achievement. The research questions centered on the level of parental involvement in their child's course selections and their knowledge of Advanced Placement courses. Parents identified ways the school could help them be more aware of student academic choices available to their children. Data for these questions was gathered from 9 face-to-face interviews and 1 telephone interview. An analysis schema, including theme coding and trend analyzing of the data, answered the questions and revealed the parents had no knowledge of the Advanced Placement courses, and they need direct communication from the school. The research led to the development of a Parental Learning Community. The project emanating from this study is a 3-part workshop. In part 1, parents learn how important their involvement is in their child's academic success. Part 2 informs parents about Advanced Placement classes. Part 3 obtains parent commitment to join the Parental Learning Community and keep it active. Positive social change may include increasing graduation rates, identifying ways schools can better support parental involvement, and preparing graduates for successful post-secondary education.

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## Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated first of all to God, who is the head of my life.

To my husband for encouraging me when I ‘saw no end’ and for offering his invaluable insight whenever I was stuck.

To my children (all nine of them) for giving me inspiration to succeed as well as quiet time to work.

To my Mom, Aunt, and Brother for understanding when I had to leave Sunday family time early to work and conference call.

To my administration whose unwavering support made it possible for me to complete this mission.

Finally, to all of my students who did not believe in themselves until they ‘looked in the mirror.’ Their perseverance is what keeps me motivated.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem .....	1
Rationale .....	4
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	4
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	5
Definitions.....	7
Significance.....	7
Guiding Research Questions.....	9
Review of the Literature .....	10
About the AP Program.....	10
Advantages of Taking AP Classes.....	12
College Readiness.....	14
Reasons for Interest and Enrollment.....	15
Reasons for Lack of Interest and Enrollment .....	16
School Culture .....	18
School Policies.....	18
School Counselors .....	19
Teachers .....	19
Students.....	20
Parents.....	22



Project Description.....	23
Summary.....	25
Section 2: The Methodology.....	27
Introduction.....	27
Types of Research.....	27
Qualitative Tradition.....	28
Research Design Justification.....	29
Participants.....	29
Selection Criteria.....	29
Number Justification.....	30
Participant Access Procedures.....	30
Establishing Researcher-Participant Relationship.....	31
Participants' Ethical Protection.....	31
Data Collection.....	32
Data Collection Instruments.....	32
Data Collection Instrument Source and Non-Use of Documents.....	35
Sufficiency of Data.....	35
Processes for Data.....	36
Tracking Data Systems and Emerging Understandings.....	36
Participant Access Procedures.....	37
Researcher Role.....	38
Data Analysis.....	38
Data Analysis Procedure.....	38

Quality and Credibility .....	39
Discrepant Cases .....	40
Data Analysis Results .....	40
Research Question 1 Findings .....	40
Research Question 2 Findings .....	44
Discrepant Data .....	46
Patterns, Relationships, and Themes .....	47
Evidence of Quality .....	47
Conclusion .....	47
Section 3: The Project .....	49
Introduction .....	49
Description and Goals .....	51
Rationale .....	51
Review of the Literature .....	53
History of PLCs .....	53
Components of PLCs .....	54
Tangible Measurement of Desired Outcomes .....	58
Implementation .....	59
Potential Resources and Existing Supports .....	59
Potential Barriers .....	59
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable .....	60
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others .....	61
Project Evaluation .....	62

Evaluation Justification.....	62
Outcomes and Performance Measures.....	62
Overall Evaluation Goals for Key Stakeholders.....	63
Implications Including Social Change.....	64
Local Community.....	64
Far-Reaching.....	64
Conclusion.....	65
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Project Strengths.....	66
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	67
Alternative Approaches.....	68
Address the Problem Differently.....	68
Alternative Definition and Solutions.....	68
Scholarship.....	69
Project Development and Evaluation.....	70
Leadership and Change.....	70
Analysis of Self as Scholar.....	71
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	71
Analysis of Self as Project Developer.....	72
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	72
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	73
Other Implications.....	73

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research .....	74
Conclusion .....	74
References.....	77
Appendix A: The Project .....	91
Appendix C: Interview Question Form.....	111
Appendix D: Mission Statement Evaluation.....	112
Appendix E: Parental Involvement T-Chart .....	113
Appendix F: Educational Outcomes Matching Activity.....	114
Appendix G: Article Website Addresses .....	115
Appendix H: Self-Reflection and Commitment .....	116
Appendix I: Reading Books and Reading Level.....	117
Appendix J: Consent Form .....	118
Appendix K: Letter of Cooperation .....	120
Appendix L: PowerPoint Presentation.....	122

List of Tables

Table 1. Alignment of Research and Interview Questions ..... 34

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

This doctoral project study addressed a problem at the local school under study in which academically able students were not partaking in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The school under study was in a low socioeconomic neighborhood, yet the parents had to choose to enroll their children in the school. Research indicated that parental influence is one of the most important aspects of education (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Likewise, parental influence has a direct correlation with successful high school graduations and higher grade point averages, in addition to student motivation and self-efficacy (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). As an outcome of this study, I proposed a Parental Learning Community (PLC) as a way to bridge the gap between academically able students and AP classes.

Section 1 specifically identifies the problem at the school under study. I discuss evidence of the problem at the local level and from current literature. This section also addresses the significance of the problem and identifies the guiding research questions. There is a review of literature about possible causes of the problem as well. This section ends with a review of the implications and the direction of the research study.

### **Definition of the Problem**

Academically adept students at the school under study are not participating in AP classes. This is a major academic dilemma at the school under study, as part of its mission is to establish both strong academics and a parenting program. Students at this school live in the midst of some of the most poverty-stricken neighborhoods within the

city. At the time of this study, the undersized school had a total population of only 347 students in Grades 9 through 12. Thus, the majority of these parents had low socioeconomic status (SES). Parent choice strictly populates the school student enrollment. A parent or guardian must apply for student enrollment. If academics were the reason for parents to choose the school, it would seem as though many of these students would seize the opportunity offered through AP classes, specifically when including consideration of their academic advantages. However, this was not the case.

This was an inner city school where approximately 72% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. The school under study was also 49% African American, 49% Hispanic, and 2% Caucasian. Only a minority (28%) of the students had financial stability, but the percentage of students in AP classes did not align with these ratios. The students within the same classes had similar demographics. Although a small portion of the student body had high SES, the majority of students had low SES classifications. According to 2014 class enrollment data at the school, poverty was not the dividing factor explaining why students did or did not enroll in AP classes. However, the parent choice requirement for enrollment indicated an illusion that academic choices may be an important factor in parents choosing the school. Examining what influenced student choice of classes was a key element in discovering the cause of this low AP enrollment. One important influence on student course choice is the parent (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

Despite local students having the necessary intellectual abilities, only a small number of able students were participating in higher level AP classes. Specifically, actual

data from the school confirmed enrollment in AP classes involved only 15.6% of our students, while over 68% of students previously passed state assessments at the recommended (higher academic) level. This problem negatively affected the school's academic rating. In the educational arena, this problem negatively influenced the success of high school graduates when pursuing a postgraduate education (Chajewski, Mattern, & Shaw, 2011). Interestingly, AP classes have a positive link with reduction in high school dropout rates (College Board, 2012). A possible cause could be the level of parental involvement in class selection experienced by students enrolled in AP courses and their counterparts. A qualitative study to investigate the level of parental involvement academically advanced students received to take AP courses was informative in finding a possible solution to remedy the situation. Such a solution may help to fill the gap that seemed to exist in offering parental support and information for their increased involvement in their students' curriculum choices.

Proximal achievement is a direct relationship linking student educational achievement with self-confidence (Goodman et al., 2011; Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellas, 2009). Ice and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) noted proximal achievement is the catalyst that spurs higher academic achievement. Similarly, Ice and Hoover-Dempsey discovered a positive correlation between parental involvement and social network. Parents feel more equipped to be academically involved with their children if there are other parents with whom they can discuss their questions and concerns (Goodman et al., 2011). Likewise, child invitations play a major role in parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). If the child welcomes the parental involvement, the parent is more likely to offer



the vital *proximal achievement*. Moreover, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) stated parental involvement heavily depends on the level of self-efficacy the parent possesses.

This problem is present at other schools in the local district along with schools within the neighboring districts. At these schools, there was also a noticeable gap between students who voluntarily take advanced classes and the students who do not. This gap appeared directly related to the students' level of parental involvement. Due to the fact students must attend neighborhood schools, it was reasonably safe to assume most of these students shared the same basic demographic data (Texas Education Code, 2013). There was a need to identify factors to improve urban academic achievement scores. Student self-esteem may also benefit (Usher & Kober, 2012).

### **Rationale**

#### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

As of 2012, AP course enrollment only comprised about 27% of students worldwide (College Board, 2012). However, more than 21 million students, or 65.9%, attended postsecondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). This disparity in percentage numbers did not correlate. Because 65.9% of these students graduated with the capabilities to be successful in college courses, it seemed as though more than 27% of them were capable of successfully completing some college courses prior to graduation. AP classes afford this opportunity, yet students are not taking advantage of them.

At the school under study, AP classes had extremely low enrollment. Of the entire student body, enrollment in AP classes was less than 10%. Contrary to this information,

state testing data identified that over 40% of the students exhibited high academic abilities. In big city schools, where families are struggling with poverty, education is not at the top of their priority list (Balfanz, 2009). The school under study, although located in a poverty-stricken, big city neighborhood, was a school where parents must choose to enroll their child to give them a better education. As I looked at the low number of students in the AP courses and thought about how involved the parents seemed to be with their children's education, I became curious as to why the parents were not encouraging their children to take full advantage of the higher academic courses offered.

According to the Public Education Information Management Systems data at the school under study, actual AP class enrollment included only 9% of the student population. However, data from the students' eighth grade year revealed the students currently in AP classes were not the only academically successful students on campus. Even though parents and guardians chose to enroll students in this parent choice school, the students were still not taking advantage of advanced level academics. It seems as though parents who register their children at charter schools are usually cognizant of the merits of education and want their children to receive the highest level of education possible. Thus, it follows these parents may not be aware these advanced classes exist. The objective of this research project was to determine if parental influence played a role in student enrollment choices.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Participation in AP classes is a prevalent indicator for future student academic success (College Board, 2012; Planty, Provasnik, & Daniel, 2007). Mo, Yang, Hu,

Calaway, and Nickey (2011) linked AP classes with advanced critical thinking skills in all subjects. AP courses help ease the transition for students to successfully complete higher level courses in the future (College Board, 2012). Interestingly, Okagaki (2001) discovered female students were more interested in AP classes than male students. Hinojosa, Robles-Pina, and Edmonson (2009) stated early participation in advanced classes was a prerequisite for many of the minority students taking AP courses. Dee and Jacobs (2009) stated students can achieve higher academic levels through proper course selection.

Redding (2006) reported parental involvement was very beneficial for increased student academics. Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams, and Keating (2009) noted parental influence on student achievement aspirations has been more indirect than direct. Astonishingly, the SES of the parent did not diminish the positive influence of parental involvement (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1998). Fehrmann, Keith, and Reimers (1987) conducted an analysis with over 28,000 high school students that confirmed parental involvement was a major contributor to student success. Even when including other variables, such as homework reminders and television time, the study established a direct correlation between parental involvement and student higher educational aspirations (Fehrmann et al., 1987). Thus, the purpose of this research project was to ascertain the degree to which parents influenced student enrollment choices at the school under study.

## Definitions

*Advanced placement (AP) classes:* College-level classes students complete in high school and receive college credit once they pass an exam (College Board, 2012).

*National Honor Society:* A student organization to which admission is granted if a student has a grade point average of at least 3.0 (National Honor Society, 2014).

*Parent choice schools:* Schools in which student enrollment requires the parent or guardian to submit an application (Villavicencio, 2013).

*Professional learning community (PLC):* A group of professionals sharing common goals with measurable outcomes (DuFour, 2014).

*Proximal achievement:* The relation between student learning and self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and self-starting abilities (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

*Socioeconomic status (SES):* A combination of an individual's or family unit's monetary and social status level, which includes their educational level and job experience (Schiff & Ravid, 2012).

## Significance

Students can only enroll at the school under study if a parent or guardian chooses to enroll them. In other words, a responsible adult in a student's life must purposely place him or her in this school. My assumption, in this research, was parents or guardians chose this school because they want their children to receive a better academic education. AP classes develop higher academic cognitive skills (Hood & Sadler, 2010). A direct correlation exists between taking AP courses and receiving a higher education degree (Hood & Sadler, 2010). It would only make sense that an increased number of high

achieving students enroll in AP courses at this school compared to other schools (College Board, 2012). This was not the case.

AP classes offer a multitude of educational advantages to high school students (College Board, 2012). AP classes allow students to be more “college ready” due to a higher educational mindset for collegial success (Geiser & Santelices, 2006). Students with AP class credit also receive increased chances of acceptance into higher level institutions (Hood & Sadler, 2010). Additionally, not having to pay for collegiate classes, in subjects they already successfully completed in high school, helps AP students save college tuition (College Board, 2012). Also, the ability grouping format of AP classes allows for a much better flow of classroom activities as well as minimizing behavioral problems, which cause academic distractions (National Center for Education Achievement, 2010). Students are able to learn more information at deeper levels of understanding (College Board, 2012). This added learning develops concentration skills that later aid in better college major and career choices (Geiser & Santelices (2006).

When academically able students fail to take AP classes, it negativity affects their motivation to learn (Usher & Kober, 2012). These students do not receive the advanced knowledge skills they should possess. As time progresses, these students lose the academic “edge” they have over their peers. Not using higher cognitive abilities causes these skills to recede (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). This leads to mediocrity and, in some cases, dropping out of school (Balfanz, 2009).

Parents who choose to put their children in a school other than their normal neighborhood public school want advantages regular schools cannot offer (Grolnick et

al., 2009). If the advantage is academics, then these students should be taking AP classes (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Parents are able to discern if their child is learning at school or not (Williams Shanks & Destin, 2009). The parents who understand education is not just a need but also a necessity for a better life, take actions to ensure their children receive a quality education (Williams Shanks & Destin, 2009). Ideally, it is reasonable these parents would take advantage of AP classes to obtain this goal. High poverty rates in the local setting would indicate a low post-graduation rate (Deming & Dynarski, 2009). Studying this problem will help the low SES students acquire college readiness skills in addition to college credits, which will help them gain acceptance into college and qualify for scholarships.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

Past research indicates students living in low-income households are less likely to complete post-high school education (Hayes, 2011). One identified cause of this is these students are not academically ready (Grolnick et al., 2009). The designs of AP courses develop college-ready skills and allow students to obtain college credits towards graduation. However, this topic, in relation to students at parent choice schools, lacks significant presence in past research. Studies link parental involvement with positive student academic achievement (Rogers et al., 2009). A qualitative study to ascertain if the level of parental involvement at parent choice schools is a mitigating factor in low student AP class enrollment follows.

Two research questions guided this study.

1. What influence do parents have on student enrollment in AP classes in parent choice schools?
2. What steps can the school implement to increase parent awareness of enrollment choices, and possibly increase student enrollment in AP classes?

### **Review of the Literature**

In conducting the literature review, I searched the EBSCO, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Sage, PsycArticles, and PSYCBooks databases of the Walden University Library, University of Phoenix Library, Dallas Public Library, and Google Scholar using the following terms: *advanced placement classes*, *advanced classes*, *AP classes*, *advanced classes and minorities*, *motivation*, *intrinsic motivation*, *parent involvement*, *AP and college*, as well as *student* and *advanced classes*. I completed additional online searches of the following websites: The College Board, the National Assessment of Educational Process, the National Center for Educational Statistics, and the U. S. Department of Education. The following review of literature presents the history leading to the development of AP courses, including the framework, benefits, and trends related to these courses.

### **History of the AP Program**

After World War II, national focus moved from protection of American citizens to educating its children (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). A study identified a gap between high school and higher level education (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). The *Kenyon Plan* studied education and formulated the best solution to close the gap at that time (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). Its main goal was

increasing the educational rigor of high school classes offered to the higher academic students (Schneider, 2009). In 1952, the first report from the *Kenyon Plan* introduced the idea to let high school students take collegiate level courses (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). Moreover, educators wanted to stop the practice of students having to take duplicate courses in both high school and college so this idea was quickly accepted (Schneider, 2009).

The AP program developed as a way to “provide motivated high school students with the opportunity to take college-level courses” (Mo et. al, 2011, p. 354). The pilot program covered eleven subjects. John Kemper created the first actual AP course in 1954 (Scott, Tolson, & Yi-Hsuan, 2010). It was so successful, the College Board began running the program in 1955. With this transition, each course packet included “a course description for teachers, a teacher’s guide, a guide for grading examinations in each subject, and the all-important AP examination” (Highsmith, 1989, p. 115). In 1990, academia decided there needed to be more equitable access to AP programs and the College Board responded (Schneider, 2009). Currently, added to the AP package is intense subject teacher training (College Board, 2012). Each year, teachers travel from all over the world to learn the intricacies of successfully teaching AP classes. Today, no matter the size or location of district, AP courses are accessible to all willing students (College Board, 2012).

As of 2012, there were 34 AP courses available in 22 different subjects (College Board, 2012). The College Board added Physics I and II in 2014. In 2008, over 3,500 colleges and universities nationwide awarded college credit for passing scores on AP



exams (College Board, 2012). Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) discovered the majority of these higher learning institutions were using the exam scores as an indicator of merit to limit the admissions of minority students. In 2012, nearly 4 million students took over 2 million tests to receive the college credit (College Board, 2012).

Spanish Language and Japanese Language and Culture are the two AP exams with the highest passing rate (College Board, 2012). Not surprisingly, over 95% of the students who take and pass the Spanish Language test are of Hispanic descent (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Likewise, the same is true for the Japanese Language and Culture test with regards to Asian students (College Board, 2012). This brings into question the level of teacher training as it relates to the exam. Hood and Sadler (2010) discussed how the rigor of teacher preparation was not in line with the rigor needed in the classroom for student success. The level of teacher preparedness in an AP classroom directs students' level of success in the classroom (Highsmith, 1989). It is each district's responsibility to ensure AP teachers' training is proper (College Board, 2012).

### **Advantages of Taking AP Classes**

Many documented advantages are present for students who enroll in AP courses. At the high school level, students in AP courses benefit from smaller classes and student-to-teacher ratios (College Board, 2012; Scott, Tolson, & Yi-Hsuan, 2010). AP classes also improve students' attributes and grade point averages for meeting college admissions criterion (College Board, 2012; National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010). Without doubt, these students exhibit higher 'college readiness' abilities and are able to bypass remedial classes, thus saving tuition expenses (College Board, 2012; Scott,

Tolson, & Yi-Hsuan, 2010). This also allows students to have an educational mindset, which improves their chances of graduating college successfully (College Board, 2012; Scott, Tolson, & Yi-Hsuan, 2010). As a result, AP students adapt more readily to the rigorous level of college classroom expectations (College Board, 2012). Both the high schools and colleges benefit from an increasing number of students who take AP courses (College Board, 2012; National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010; Scott, Tolson, & Yi-Hsuan, 2010).

Students gain a higher level of cognitive thinking abilities when ability grouped (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995). Mo et al. (2011) found a direct correlation between students in AP classes and increased college entrance exam test scores. The College Board AP program regulates the subjects taught including the curriculum. For student exams, the College Board is responsible for the content and format (College Board, 2012). This, of course, means they are also responsible for scoring the exams.

In addition, The College Board notified students and schools of their exam scores. However, colleges determine whether or not they will accept AP test scores for credit, including what level score they will accept (Moore & Slate, 2010). An AP exam score of 5 is equivalent to an A in the related college course and indicates a student is *extremely well qualified*, a score of 4 is equivalent to a B and gives a *well qualified* indicator, and a score of 3 is equivalent to a C (College Board, 2012). Unfortunately, most colleges will not consider awarding college credit for a score of 2 or 1, and very few will award college credit for a 3 (College Board, 2012). However, most colleges do not use these scores to determine college admission, as the release of these scores are usually during

the summer following the AP exam completion (Geiser & Santelices, 2006). A regular review of college curriculum and semester exams, by the College Board, determines the rating of the scores. The College Board adjusts the scoring rubric to ensure it is closely in sync with what higher level institutions currently expect (College Board, 2012).

### **College Readiness**

AP courses give students a chance to show they are college ready, obtain college admission quicker, and gain knowledge of how college classes are structured (College Board, 2012; National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010). These courses can also lower the cost of collegiate education and offer a better opportunity to graduate early (within 3.5 years) or in 4 years (Barnard-Brak, McGaha-Garnett, & Burley, 2011; Mo et al., 2011; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). A prevalent indicator for student academic success is their participation in AP classes (College Board, 2012; Planty et al., 2007). Okagaki (2001) found female students more interested in AP classes than male students. However, Scott et al. (2010) noted male students were more likely to successfully receive AP college credit by passing the AP exams. Hinojosa et al. (2009) stated early participation in advanced classes was a prerequisite for many of the minority students taking AP courses. In spite of the academic achievement gap, some minority students succeed academically (Hayes, 2011; Okagaki, 2001; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

In 1967, Burham and Hewitt completed the first analysis of the AP program. The findings included the fact AP students not only outperformed their counterparts in college grades, but also successfully completed more higher level college courses in their AP

subjects (Burham & Hewitt, 1967). Casserly (1986) noted AP students received higher grades in upper level courses of the subjects in which they received AP credit.

Specifically, Pfeifferberger and Modu (1977) conducted a study that confirmed students in Physics II who completed AP Physics performed higher than students who took Physics I in college. In 1982, the University of Michigan (as cited in Chajewski et al., 2011) determined AP classes better prepared students for college success. Willingham and Morris (1986) found AP students were more likely to maintain a B average, graduate with honors, and engage in more difficult career fields.

Subsequently, Morgan and Crone (1993) found all of the previously reported results still evident. Morgan and Ramist (1998) stated 4 out of 5 AP students scored highly in the second phase coursework (students who received introductory core credits through the AP program). In another study, Chajewski et al. (2011) deduced students enrolled in AP classes experienced a 171% increase in successfully completing postsecondary education over students who did not. This increase, in the graduation rate, was apparent regardless of race, location, or SES of the student (College Board, 2012).

### **Reasons for Interest and Enrollment**

Schultz (2012) said “Advanced Placement courses contribute to the highest level of academic intensity in a high school curriculum” (p. 119). In 2005, the National Center for Educational Accountability released a report on the relationship between AP classes and college graduation (Dougherty, Miller, & Jian, 2006). They concluded AP students passing the exams associated with the classes were the best indicator of their future success in college; although, the percentage was only as high as the teacher’s

effectiveness. Additionally, there is a direct correlation between AP class students and high school students' college readiness indices (Dougherty, Miller, & Jian, 2006). Students who take AP courses have a tendency to carry a full college load, which enables them to graduate in a timely manner (Highsmith, 1989). In a previous study, Geiser and Santelices (2004) noted the number of AP courses on a student's high school transcript did not have the same weight as the number of students who actually passed the exam and received college credit for courses. The National Center for Educational Achievement report recommended using AP classes as an effective method to prepare low income students for higher education success (National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010).

### **Reasons for Lack of Interest and Enrollment**

There are many possible reasons responsible for the lack of interest in AP course enrollment within parent choice schools. One reason is the school counselor not emphasizing the advantages these classes offer. Another reason is teachers who, for a multitude of reasons, do not recommend certain types of students to take AP courses. An educational procedural reason is the lack of policy which would place students in AP classes automatically based on their grades in previous courses (or even current courses). Of course, the individual student also has control of his placement in AP courses.

Another reason for lack of enrollment is the concern students who graduate from college early, through the use of AP credits, lose time needed to properly mature (Chapman, 1962). In fact, a faction of educators believes overlooking some important academic building foundations derives from content acceleration (Chapman, 1962).

However, the most prevalent reason for lack of enrollment, identified by research, is the parent who can increase student enrollment in AP classes. Most schools allow student enrollment in AP classes through parent request. Thus, there would be many more college ready and career minded students taking these advanced classes if more parents requested them to do so.

Not surprisingly, there is a lack of minority students in low-income neighborhoods enrolled in AP programs. Literature placed the blame for this on a variety of reasons. School culture discourages these students from registering in AP classes (Schultz, 2012). Some students believe ridiculing or shunning will occur if they 'look smart.' School policies also play a major role in this problem. Schools have set in place parameters which discourage minority students, and their parents, from attempting to enroll in these programs. Either there is no interest on the part of the parents or they discourage their child from taking advanced courses because they believe the child is not academically able. The teacher is another disabling reason. Some teachers discourage a student simply because they do not like the student's attitude (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2008). Other teachers do not have proper training to recognize AP student characteristics and, therefore, do not recommend students who deserve to be a part of the program. Likewise, the students themselves hinder their enrollment in the AP program (Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson, 2011). They often doubt their own abilities for success or want to take easier courses to keep their grade point average high.

### **School Culture**

School culture in low SES schools tends to be an atmosphere in which spurning or mockery of students can happen if they aspire to take higher level classes. Although most of the students want to better themselves, many of them receive no encouragement to stand out or be different. Thus, they stay in the regular classes. Some students even go so far as to intentionally not do their homework so they will blend in with everyone else (Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, & Pugh, 2011). School atmosphere has a direct influence on student academic achievement (Rogers et al., 2009). This school culture can work against AP course enrollment and hinder students from higher academic achievements. AP classes encourage students to achieve more (Camara, Dorans, Morgan, & Myford, 2000). Most AP courses are smaller and allow students to have more one-to-one teacher time (College Board, 2012). “Classroom competition, family culture and environment, personal aspiration factors, and study habits positively motivate students to do better” (Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012, p. 20).

### **School Policies**

Regulation of school policies has many different levels. These laws emanate at the national, state, county, city, school district, and individual school level. Barber & Torney-Purta (2008, p. 412) noted there are still “large differences in policies used to determine who is eligible for these (types of) programs.” Although, the general intent of the laws is to create equity of opportunity within the schools, some of the outdated laws need revision or deletion (Wright, Jr. and Harris, 2010).

**School Counselors**

Counselors guide the emotional culture as they enforce the policies of the school. Therefore, they have a major role in student selection of AP courses. A school counselor has direct access to students and can recommend the AP classes. She is able to meet with parents to discuss the direction of the student's education. Likewise, the school counselor has access to the school staff to encourage the teachers and administrators to admit certain students into the AP program. School counselors can hold "school wide interventions" to address the students, staff developments to inform the teachers, and parent meetings to engage parents in increasing access to and enrollment in AP courses (Rogers et al., 2009).

**Teachers**

Teachers play a vital role in students attempting and completing AP classes (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson (2011) reported if taught by a "great teacher," students will choose higher level courses (p. 1059). They are the ones who encourage the students to try the harder level classes. There is a correlation in gender and student selection. Studies found females are more often recommended for higher level classes than males (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2008; Okagaki, 2001). Barba & Torney-Purta noted teachers often do not recommend the same students identified through advanced level tests (2008). Much of this discourse is due to teachers' lack of proper training in identifying advanced level students. Teachers will not recommend a student for AP classes based on their behavior or maturity level (Rogers et al., 2009). In addition,



teachers tend to assume students with low SES lack academic motivation and, therefore, cannot successfully complete AP courses (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2008).

At the other end of the spectrum, teachers will recommend students solely on their grades within the regular classroom. Barber & Torney-Purta (2008) summarized this phenomenon as being an unconscious teacher bias. There is a strong correlation between positive teacher to student relationships and aspirations for higher academic classes (Rogers et al., 2009). Irvin, Hannum, Farmer, de la Varre, & Keane (2000) acknowledged there is a lack of qualified teachers in the AP arena. There is a need for additional teacher training; not only in teaching AP courses, but in the attributes necessary to identify possible AP students.

### **Students**

Students, themselves, are a major component for their lack of attendance in AP classes (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008); Wang & Eccles, 2012). Barber & Torney-Purta (2008) discussed how “students’ interactions with friends and peers influence students’ engagement in school” (p. 416). These students have an inner conflict between their personal academic goals and their social needs (Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Murdock, 2009). Students reported they will choose an AP class if it is fun, they feel they can achieve success, they want to learn more, or they plan on using the subject matter in the future (Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson, 2011). Students’ level of intrinsic motivation also directs their class decision processes (Gottfried et al., 1994; Irvin, et. al, 2009; Rogers et al., 2009; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). If students do not believe they can be successful in an AP class, they will not take an AP course. However, teacher nominated

students who to take AP courses experience increased self-efficacy, which aids their continued success (Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012).

Students with high self-efficacy do not consider whether or not they can achieve success, as they believe success is a given and are willing to take the AP courses (Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson, 2011). These students receive more positive peer support to take the advanced level classes (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2008). Another factor in students taking AP courses is their social or academic goals (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2008). Their motivation derives from “personal aspiration factors and study habits” (Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012, p. 21). Dependent upon the students’ future aspirations, they may have a hidden agenda to be successful in AP courses (Scott et al., 2010). Each student has a different self-concept which defines their confidence, but outside influences help shape these definitions (Scott et al., 2010).

Yu (2011) noted the close relationship between motivation and student academic achievement. Ice & Hoover-Dempsey (2011) called this relationship ‘proximal achievement.’ Proximal achievement links student learning and self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and self-starting abilities (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Each one of these entities acts as a catalyst to boost student achievement. Vygotsky (1978) developed the zone of proximal development which established students learn the most when the task they are attempting is achievable with extra assistance. Parents deliver the most influential extra assistance (French, Walker, & Shore, 2011). Students’ acknowledgement that the extra help is welcome, increases their level of success in relation to proximal achievement (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

## Parents

Parents are a defining force in the student course decision-making process. They affect students' achieving higher academic scores and choices to take higher level cognitive classes (Dweck, 2010; Grolnick et al., 2009; Hayes, 2011; Heckman, 2011; Rogers et al., 2009). This is true for both mothers and fathers. Supportive and nurturing parents promote higher self-efficacy within the student (Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012). Students perceive they can achieve success in AP classes simply because their parents believe they can. Studies link a direct correlation between parental support at home and school achievement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Rogers et al., 2009; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Williams Shanks, & Destin, 2009; Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, & Pugh, 2011).

Redding (2006) reported parental involvement in student academics is very beneficial. Rogers et al. (2009) noted the biggest influence parental involvement has on student achievement aspirations is more indirect than direct. Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby (2008) noted parents must have all necessary information in order to make knowledgeable decisions, and many minority parents had no knowledge of AP courses offered at their children's school. Cheung & Pomerantz (2012) observed "children's learning was predictive of children's parent-oriented motivation in school ... which predicted enhanced achievement among students" (p. 9).

Epstein (1986) defined parental educational involvement as a parents' "investment of various resources in their child's education" (p. 162). This involvement, then, includes academic and non-academic participation. She categorized parental

involvement into five avenues: parenting, helping with homework, communications with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision making (Epstein, 1986). These include a parent showing up at a sports event, volunteering in the classroom, helping their student with homework or just making sure the student completes the homework, or simply making sure the students attends school on a regular basis. Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett (1990) established these parental social relationships are vital to student success. Fehrmann et al. (1987) conducted an analysis involving over 28,000 high school students. They confirmed parental involvement is a major contributor to student success. Even while adding other factors, such as homework reminders and television time, a direct correlation established a relationship between parental involvement and student higher educational aspirations. Usher & Kober (2012) specifically identified six tasks parents can do to motivate their students to attain higher aspirations: “praising effort, persistence, and mastery of subjects...talking to (students)...celebrating their learning...creative exploration (opportunities)...see academic achievement...setting realistic but high standards.” Parental support works, even if the parent knows nothing about the subjects the students are taking (Grolnick et al., 2009).

### **Project Description**

The review of literature identifies possible ways to redirect the current trend of academically high students avoiding AP classes. The research pinpointed many possible causes of this phenomenon, as well as the conclusion that parental influence seems to have the biggest effect on it. The research implied parents of high academic students not

enrolled in AP classes possess no information about the availability and benefits of such classes (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Parental involvement is most important for student motivation when aspiring to higher academic achievement (Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson, 2011). A qualitative study examining why some parents of academically able students do not encourage their children to enroll in AP classes could potentially increase AP course participation, and have positive social implications for many. Among the many possible long term results, parents engage more in school activities and students receive better preparation for post-secondary schooling.

A project focusing on educating parents about AP classes could serve to increase parent awareness of AP classes and, in turn, increase the number of students enrolled in these classes. One project indicated from the review of literature was to establish a PLC to inform parents about the AP program and other school-related activities available to their children. Data could be made available about the benefits of AP classes on both the local and national level. This PLC also provides suggestions for ways parents can increase their students' chances of successfully completing AP courses. The parents would then have an infrastructure network within the PLC to facilitate communication with each other. The establishment of an online community, or Blog, will allow for parental questions, comments, suggestions, and encouragement as an extension of the PLC. This will expedite parents receiving information about the importance of their involvement in class selections and, perhaps, even learn persuasive techniques to convince their children they should enroll in AP courses.

## Summary

Section 1 includes a comprehensive history of the creation and effects of AP classes. These courses, throughout the years, continue to fulfill their original intent: to bridge the gap between high school and collegiate classes on the same subject (College Board, 2012). However, in spite of the multiple benefits available to high school students who successfully pursue AP classes, there are many capable and able students who do not enroll in these classes. Section 1 also includes the literature review, definitions of the special terms used in this doctoral study, the rationale for the study, and the significance of the problem. Included as well are the research questions that guided the study.

The remaining sections are a culmination of the discovered information in the first section. They include a qualitative case study designed to ascertain possible solutions to the problem. They also include a possible solution to the problem. Included in the Appendix is this completed solution, along with its justified data. There is also a section for reflections and conclusions about the proposed project.

Section 2 consists of the methodology for the qualitative case study, the design and approach, setting, and sample of the planned study. It includes the instrumentation and materials needed to conduct the study. In addition, it describes the data collection and analysis plans. Also, Section 2 includes the data gathered from the study and an interpretation of its implications. In like manner, Section 2 describes the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations of the study.

Section 3 consists of the proposed project. It is a professional development training for parents. Included is the reasoning that led to the chosen project resulting from

the review of literature. There is a complete project description and evaluation plan. Also, there is a discussion about the implications of the project.

Section 4 portrays the author's reflections and final conclusions. Also encompassed in this section are the strengths and limitations of the project and an exploration of any alternative approaches to the problem. Present as well is a discussion on scholarship, project development, and leadership. The reflection confers the importance of the work in addition to its possible future implications, applications, and directions. These may be useful for future research projects.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify and investigate the reason academically able students in a parent choice school were not enrolling in AP classes. This qualitative case study of interviews with 10 parents as to their level of involvement in student course selection, as well as their knowledge of AP courses, provided insight into how enrollment in AP classes could increase. Included is an exploration of ways to increase parental awareness and involvement. The AP classes offer a myriad of advantages to students who take them and pass the end-of-year examinations (College Board, 2012). According to the charter schools' website, parents are the sole reason students enroll in parent choice schools. Accordingly, students who qualify to become members of the National Honor Society have high academic skills (National Honor Society, 2014). This study examined why these academically advanced students were not taking AP courses.

### **Types of Research**

There are three types of research studies: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. Each one of these is able to provide different types of data dependent upon the research questions being asked. The distinction between them is determined in three ways: the research process, the data collection method, and the research philosophy (Allwood, 2011). Quantitative data gathers some types of information while dialogue or verbal data gathers other types of information better (Stangor, 2011). It is best for a researcher to understand his or her goals before determining the best type of research study to conduct (Cresswell, 2008).



Quantitative research offers a complete, detailed picture of what is happening and possible reasons for it (Stangor, 2011). The data used in this type of study are quantitative or numerical (for example, using previously gathered numerical data or surveys) and offer various correlations (Cresswell, 2008). Qualitative research classifies data to provide possible reasons for why something is occurring (Stangor, 2011). The data gathered from interviews or certain kinds of observations in this type of study are usually narrative and verbal (Cresswell, 2008). Mixed methods research combines both of these methods and used by researchers who believe the only way to get the answers they seek is to understand both what and why a phenomenon occurred (Stangor, 2011). Mixed methods research is a combination of the other two types with one usually being slightly more dominant than the other (Cresswell, 2008).

Historical data were not available to provide answers to this study's research questions (Cresswell, 2008). An ethnographical study would not be beneficial as the participants were from different cultural backgrounds (Cresswell, 2008). Likewise, a phenomenological study was not appropriate as the students of these parents have no previous experience in AP classes (Cresswell, 2008). This project study was a single event (Brooks, 2009). Therefore, I chose the qualitative case study method because I needed to understand why students were not electing to study AP level courses at the school under study.

### **Qualitative Tradition**

For the current problem, it was imperative to understand why the problem was occurring. Therefore, to grasp the influence parents at the school under study had on AP

class enrollment, I conducted a qualitative study. Within the qualitative branch of research designs, I used a case study approach. Case studies examine an occurrence within its natural setting (Cresswell, 2008). This project study used the parents of identified students. Interviews occurred at the school site.

### **Research Design Justification**

A qualitative study gives insight about why a phenomenon is occurring (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather data in an attempt to understand why fewer students were taking AP classes. Simply knowing the number of students who were taking AP classes (quantitative evidence) would not inform as to why this number was so small. This study attempted to determine the reasons why parents of academically able students were not encouraging enrollment in AP courses at a parent choice school. The data gathered consisted of the viewpoints from parents of students who had shown academic prowess yet not enrolled in any AP classes. My desire was to find out how these parents were thinking. This data is not quantifiable.

### **Participants**

#### **Selection Criteria**

The targeted population included parents of academically able students not currently enrolled in an AP class. The sample comprised parents of students at the local school not enrolled in an AP class. To obtain the sample, the roll of the National Honor Society identified participants. In order for students to become a member of the National Honor Society, they must have a grade point average of at least 3.25. This National Honor Society member list also consisted of students who were academically superior to

their classmates. Cross referencing these names with AP class enrollment lists confirmed their non-enrollment in AP courses. The parents selected were those of students who were on the National Honor Society roll and not on the AP enrollment roster. These parents received an invitation for an interview that clearly stated the purpose of the research study and their role, should they choose to participate with an enclosed consent form.

### **Number Justification**

The sample's population totaled 10 parents. In order for a qualitative study to be representative of a larger population, there must be enough participants to provide a broad analysis of the phenomena (Cresswell, 2008). By using 10 parents, I devoted enough time to thoroughly investigate my research questions. If no saturation of the data occurred (similar answers not being repeated), the same method would identify additional participants (Stangor, 2011). This method provided enough data to identify probable explanations of what was causing the non-AP enrollment situation.

### **Participant Access Procedures**

Qualifying parents received a letter asking them to participate in either an audio-taped face-to-face interview or an audio-taped telephone interview. Each participant acquired an identification number. These numbers represented the participants on the transcripts. Face-to-face interviews allow for more in-depth clarification as the interviewer can adapt the questions as needed and nonverbal cues allow the investigator further insight into participants' responses (Opdenakker, 2006). Voice inflection and intonation helped guide the direction of the interview for the participant who chose a

phone interview (West & Turner, 2009). The face-to-face interviews occurred during non-instructional school hours at the school in a classroom. A locked door and a sign posted on the door, which read “Private Meeting – Do Not Enter” provided additional security and safe guards for the participants.

### **Establishing Researcher-Participant Relationship**

Included in the letter was an introduction of me as the researcher with a statement concerning the basis of the project. This consent form included sample questions and an explanation of the purpose of the research. I spoke directly to the participants to determine their time and day preference for the interview. Assurances ensured participation was strictly optional and in no way affected their children’s grades, or their relationship with their teachers or the school. The parents also had the opportunity for a translator to be present, if needed, and the translator signed a confidentiality form. However, no need existed for a translator as all participants spoke English. Provided researcher contact information allowed each perspective participant an avenue to address all questions and concerns and aid in their final participation decision making (Girvan & Savage, 2012). Once parents had ample opportunity, at least a week, to consider their participation, they signed the consent form and returned it to me via the U.S. Postal Service. Each consent form mailing included a self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed to aid in its return to me.

### **Participants’ Ethical Protection**

It is the researcher’s duty to identify any possible threats or conflicts involving the participants (Girvan & Savage, 2012). As an employee at the school under study, I strove

to ensure my role did not create a false-answer atmosphere (Jaya, Hinden, & Ahmed, 2008). To reduce bias, I only selected parents of students not currently in my class. This assured the parents did not feel pressured to participate or answer untruthfully because they feared negatively affecting their children's grades or school relationships.

Participants also had the opportunity to withdraw their consent and end the interview at any time with no penalty. To further protect participants, a removal occurred of actual names and other identifiers from the interview data. Other coding of the interviews provided future verification only if needed. The participants examined their transcriptions of the interviews for accuracy. The parents member-checked the data for completeness and accuracy (Yin, 2009).

## **Data Collection**

### **Data Collection Instruments**

There were nine face-to-face interviews and one phone interview. Transcription into a Word document immediately followed the audio recording of each interview. Each Word document contained the number of the interviewee it represented. Coded numbers, entered on a separate Word document, ensured participant anonymity. Safekeeping of these document included storing them into a folder on a password protected computer.

The telephone and face-to-face interviews allowed for a comprehensive study of a single event which occurred in a single space (Brooks, 2009). The goal of this study was to examine if parents were a possible underlying reason for low AP class enrollment. The most appropriate data collection method was the interview. It allows the researcher to

probe and obtain deeper enlightenment of the situation (Cresswell, 2008). The interview questions aligned with the research questions.

Table 1

*Alignment of Research and Interview Questions*

Research Question	What influence do parents have on student enrollment in AP classes in parent choice schools?	What steps can the school implement to increase parent awareness of enrollment choices, and possibly increase student enrollment in AP classes?
Corresponding Interview Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you choose to enroll your child in a charter school?</li> <li>• In what ways, if any, do you help your child decide which courses to take?</li> <li>• What are your educational goals for your child?</li> <li>• What do you know about the Advanced Placement (AP) program offered at the school?</li> <li>• Why have/have not you encouraged your child to enroll in AP courses?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What steps could this school implement to increase your awareness about the courses offered?</li> <li>• What could this school do to help you encourage your child to enroll in AP courses?</li> </ul>

### **Data Collection Instrument Source and Non-Use of Documents**

The design of the first research question discovered the level of parental involvement connected to student class choices; whereas the second research question attempted to discover ways school can help parents increase their involvement. The first interview question provided background on why the parents selected a parent choice school. The next two interview questions focused on the level of parental involvement present. Subsequently, two questions which examined the level of awareness the parents have about AP courses followed. The last two interview questions provided insight into how the parents felt the school could support and help them. While designed to illuminate the cause of the problem, the interview questions also identified a possible solution.

No previous research existed specifically for this problem. Thus, an existing qualitative study protocol did not exist. The nature of the questions were exclusively relevant to the school under study, thus I development them. The initial review of literature provided the foundational context for the content of the questions. The actual source for the data collection instrument was myself. Likewise, no sources of data consisted of historical data or legal documents.

### **Sufficiency of Data**

The interview questions gathered information about the level of parental support provided for class selection (Boswell, 2011). In order for this information to be valuable, additional interview response data outlined the level of parental knowledge about AP courses. A case study can authenticate or expand previous knowledge (Yin, 2009). The



participants' answers provided insight as to why their children were not enrolling in AP courses. This means specific words defended the choice of conducting a qualitative study.

### **Processes for Data**

The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes during non-instructional hours. Participants picked their interview day and time from an available schedule. There were a total of 10 audio-taped interviews, with 367 total minutes worth of data. There were seven questions used to guide the interviews. Each of these questions was open-ended to allow for maximum participant response. The open-ended questions also allowed for more objectivity (Vassilieva, 2012). I used no more than 3 additional questions to clarify any answers from the original questions to avoid researcher influence on the answers (Vassilieva, 2012). All interview questions are in Appendix B.

Results from the interviews included data confirming most of the parents did not know about AP classes, let alone the many facets of AP classes. Three of the parents had knowledge of AP classes, yet their children still did not take the classes. Using only seven guiding questions allowed room and time for open-ended exploration. I anticipated some of the interviews would contain differences which required further exploration. Participants knew the interviews were recorded for future transcription.

### **Tracking Data Systems and Emerging Understandings**

Upon signing appropriate university consent forms, each parent's interview occurred without other parents present. There was no need for an interpreter. Participants arrived for their face-to-face interview and chose refreshment from a drink and fruit tray. During this time, a review of the interview format transpired. The participants knew

when the formal interview and its recording began. Upon completion of the interviews, participants agreed to a follow-up verification appointment.

A verbatim transcription followed each taped interview. At a follow-up appointment, the interviewees verified their responses were correct on the transcriptions. In two instances, the taped recording had to be replayed for the member to recall their response. Storing of the numbered interview transcription occurred after completion of the member-checking for reliability. As reading of the transcriptions took place, highlights outlined significant and recurring data.

A research log kept track of these data using an Excel spreadsheet (Yin, 2009). The log included the response and its correlating interview question. Labeling using a pseudonym, date, and duration of the interview classified the interview data. A locked and password protected computer stored the log. This ensured confidentiality of the data while providing an individual identity for each participant. One emerging understanding present was the parents' lack of knowledge about AP courses. Another emerging understanding evident was the parents' lack of hands-on involvement with their child's course selection.

### **Participant Access Procedures**

The participants were parents whose students exhibited higher academic abilities. These students showed, over time, they were able to maintain high academic standards. They exhibited increased cognitive skills. The parents of these students received invitations to participate and I allowed time for them to consider their acceptance of the invitation. Addressing of questions and concerns happened during this time. These

parents voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate, and none had children in my classroom at the time.

### **Researcher Role**

As a teacher at my school, I may have had some of these students in my class in previous years. None of these students of the participating parents were on track to have to take my class in the future. As a National Honor Society sponsor, I had access to these students' parents; however, there was no way to revoke any students' membership in the Society if the parents chose not to participate. Entrance into National Honor Society derives solely from the students' academic records. My biased belief was the parents were the main reason for the lack of AP class enrollment. To combat this, exploratory interview questions guided this study. No coercion persuaded a parent one way or the other.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Once the participants verified the transcribed information was correct, an identification of the recurring themes among the responses occurred (Cresswell, 2008). Color coded themes received a one to two word identifier using the research questions as a standard. Each significant theme received a new color and identifier. Placing the information into a cross referenced table established any relationships. This information determined an appropriate project to raise parental awareness of AP courses.

The coding included multiple steps. One step included labeling of the interview questions. An examination of the labels and grouping them into categories followed.

Next, a review of these categories identified top recurring themes. An examination of these themes determined a possible project to help alleviate this problem. Discarded was any “contrary evidence” (Creswell, 2008, p. 257). Common phrases determined response placement.

Hand analyzing induced data analysis (Creswell, 2008). Member checking reduced the threat of quality of the instrument. A revelation of the results was in a descriptive narrative report, which is standard in qualitative studies (Anyan, 2013). A “discussion of themes” revealed the data (Creswell, 2008, p. 263). The interpretation presented led to a discussion of the project needed.

### **Quality and Credibility**

To account for data credibility, I incorporated multiple processes for data collection. I impartially made comparisons between the multiple interviews. This type of evaluation, comparing multiple interviews using the same criterion, certifies that the data is credible and reliable (Cresswell, 2008). This constitutes sufficient evidence to validate the findings. Also, the similarities within the majority of participants’ responses add credence.

The participants looked at each response to confirm what they said was accurately recorded. Participants also received a copy of the transcription to confirm their exactness. At the completion of member checking, corrections of any responses if needed for clarification occurred. Each participant signed their name confirming their interview accurately reflected their thoughts before use of their data. No detection of researcher bias incurred.

### **Discrepant Cases**

No requirement of enrolling in AP courses existed. Thus, there were a few replies to the interview questions which had no bearing on the study (Yin, 2009). Records of these responses are in the report of findings. However, there is no inclusion of these responses in the data-analysis. Due to the unpredictability of this type of data, the irrelevancy of these discrepant replies deemed them unnecessary to the final project within this study.

### **Data Analysis Results**

It is apparent parents choose parent choice schools because they want their child to receive a good education. All 10 parents indicated that higher academics were the main reason they enrolled their child in the school under study. In order to discover why the students were not taking advantage of the higher academic AP courses, the interview questions focused on how involved the parents were in their child's course selections and how the school could better inform and involve them in this process. The data comes from 10 parent interviews. The responses aligned with the research questions, which justifies the signified data.

### **Research Question 1 Findings**

The first four questions answered the first research question: "What influence do parents have on student enrollment in AP classes in parent choice schools?" The questions identify two different themes: parental involvement in course selection and parental knowledge of AP courses. There were five interview questions related to this research question. Over half of the parents had similar responses for the questions in this

part. They all wanted to learn more about the AP courses and how to get their child enrolled in them.

**Interview Question 1 responses.** The first interview question inquired as to why the parents chose to enroll their child in a parent choice school. One of the assumptions I made is that the parents chose the school for its higher academic classes. All 10 parents responded they wanted a “better education” for their child. Two of these parents reported they did not want their child to attend the neighborhood school as they “do not teach anything” or “value education.” Another participant responded she “wanted her child to be in a safe environment.”

Two other parents responded that the moral values of the school appealed to them. They liked the character building curriculum that is one of the foundational programs at the school. Another parent added she also wanted “better severity” for her child to make sure she did her work. Upon exploration, she clarified that she wanted her child to attend a school in which “it was expected that she would do her homework and that the school would let (her) know if her child was not doing her work.” The parents at the school under study chose the school to allow their child to receive a better education than they perceived their local school offered.

**Interview Question 2 responses.** The second interview question asked the parents how involved they were, if at all, in helping their child chooses courses to take at the school. Six parents reported they had no involvement with the student course selection at all. One parent summed up their attitude when she said, “I always thought the school and the counselors chose the courses she needed in order to graduate.” Three of

the parents said they were minimally involved in their child's course selection, only if the student requested their input. The last parent said he "ask(s) him what courses he has each year."

Specifically, one parent responded that she just made sure her child "had all of the basic requirements" for graduation. Another parent responded, "I am not sure what classes she needs to take, but she knows; so I let her decide." One other parent also admitted that she allowed her child to make the decisions. Yet another participant responded that he "thought the school set the curriculum and chose the courses ... takes to make sure he graduates with everything he needs." These responses indicate that it is not lack of interest on the parts of these parents, but lack of knowledge concerning school class choice procedures.

**Interview Question 3 responses.** The third interview question was "What are your educational goals for your child?" The purpose of this question was to validate my assumption that parents at parent choice schools have concerns pertaining to their child's education. Eight of the parents had the same themed response; they hoped their children would go to college and get a degree. One of the parents already knew their child would be joining the marines, but she "still wanted her child to get a good education because you need one no matter what you are going to do in life." The 10th parent's response was that she just "wanted to make sure she graduates as no one in my family has a high school degree yet and she will be the first." She further went on to say that she had "not thought about what ... would do after high school, she just wanted her to get through that first."

The parents interviewed all had high academic goals for their students (according to their educational perspective).

**Interview Question 4 responses.** The fourth and last interview question related to the first research question asked the participants what they knew about AP courses. Only three parents had knowledge about the program. None of the other seven participants knew about the courses at all or that the school under study offers AP classes. Specific answers were, “I do not,” “I did not know the program existed,” “I don’t”, “nothing,” and “this is my first time hearing about it.” Many of them asked what the program was as they were not aware of AP classes. With the offering of an AP program explanation, one parent responded “Well, why hasn’t the school told us about these programs before now?” The responses to this interview question overwhelmingly vindicate my assumption that not all parents at the school under study have knowledge of AP courses.

**Interview Question 5 responses.** The fifth interview question was a follow-up to the fourth interview question and asked the parents about their motivations in not encouraging their child to enroll in AP courses. The seven parents with no knowledge of the courses responded they did not know about AP classes, so how could they recommend them. One of the parents who responded she had knowledge about the AP courses, said her child would be attending the Marines and “... used to be in AP classes, but then they realized she would not need those courses in the Marines, so they allowed her to drop out of the AP program and take regular education classes.” One of the other parents with AP course knowledge responded he “thought the students had to be pre-



selected from their previous school to be enrolled in the courses.” He further iterated he “did not know that enrollment in the class could occur by parent or student choice.” The third AP course knowledge parent responded “because ... got lazy whenever the teacher said she had to write a bunch of essays in government and economics so she refused to do any more AP courses.” These responses help clarify why none of the parents encouraged their child to enroll in AP courses.

### **Research Question 2 Findings**

The second research question, addressed within the last two interview questions, asked: “What steps can the school implement to increase parent awareness of enrollment choices, and possibly increase student enrollment in AP classes?” I believed the best way to increase AP course enrollment with academically able students would be to make the parents aware of AP course offerings available at the school under study. In order to best accomplish this, I wanted direct responses from the parents concerning which communication avenues they preferred. Traditionally, the school under study relies on sending announcements home with the students to communicate with the parents. This is a practice adopted from the elementary section for the school, when the teachers would put the announcements in the students’ folders and the parents would get the announcements out. I was not certain that this process still occurred in the high school section of the school; and, thus, included the last two questions of the interview.

**Interview Question 6 responses.** The sixth interview question asked the participants, “What steps could this school implement to increase your awareness about the courses offered?” The recurring theme from all 10 parents’ responses indicated a need

for the school to let them know directly about the AP program, its requirements, and its benefits. More specifically, some of the answers were “send a note home,” “send home a scheduled monthly newsletter,” “post the information on the website,” and “let us now during one of the parent meeting sessions.” Further probing of the parents who wanted the information just sent home resulted in all but one of them acknowledging their child does not give them most of the information sent home. They changed their answer to either putting the course information on the website or letting them know about the courses at the parent meetings. Moreover, the parent who suggested the scheduled monthly newsletter admitted “it needs to be scheduled so that I can make sure he gives it to me, because I know when to expect it.” Another parent expressed her frustration at never receiving letters from the high school but “I get tons of stuff from the elementary school in my child’s folder.” It is apparent that high school parents at the school under study need more direct communication from the school.

**Interview Question 7 responses.** The final interview question queried the parents about ways the school could support them in encouraging their child to attend AP courses. One participant responded that the school could “give me ideas on how to convince her that she needs to take classes that will give her better opportunities in college.” Another participant responded that the school could “make sure the teachers tell the students about the classes first so when I talk to him about it, he will already know what I am talking about.” Three participants summed up both of these answers by responding “let me know about the courses, what they are, and what the benefits are,” “educate the parents by sending letters home or inspire their kids in taking the courses,”

and “just speak to her more about it, encourage her more, (what could we do to help you encourage her) keep me informed.” Still, another participant responded, “the school should keep me informed as other AP courses are offered and maybe I can encourage her to get into one that does not require as much writing as the English one did, like maybe math or science. Maybe then she would get back into the courses.” The participant responses expressed their desire for more communication from the school than just an announcement about the AP courses offered.

### **Discrepant Data**

As stated earlier, one of the parents said her child was going to attend the Marines. She clarified, “we did not feel like she needed to continue taking the harder classes as she would not need them where she was going.” Another of the parents stated she only wanted to make sure her child did her homework correctly and graduated high school. When questioned about her goals beyond high school, she said she hoped her child was “able to get a good job.” Another parent said he had not encouraged his son to enroll in AP courses because he was participating in an in-school advanced academics course. He said the fact the students get the credit immediately upon passing the class versus waiting on a cumulative test result was more appealing to (him).” This parent also indicated he was extremely knowledgeable about the AP program and the courses offered at the school. As these data were sole answers (only given once), there was no need to include them in the interpretations (Osborne and Overbay, 2004).

### **Patterns, Relationships, and Themes**

All 10 parents chose the school based on its academic record. Nine of the parents stated their educational goal was for their student to graduate college. Eight parents indicated no knowledge of AP courses offered at the school or their benefits. Once an explanation of the AP program occurred, the parents unanimously expressed dismay as they would have had their child take the classes. Specifically, some of their responses were “had I known about these courses, I would have insisted she enroll in them,” “if I knew these classes existed, I would made sure he was in them,” and “Oh no, this is terrible, I would love for her to be in classes that can help her get college credit ahead of time.” All of the parents admonished this type of information needed conveyance directly to them from the school, and not through the students.

### **Evidence of Quality**

The interview content validity measurement compared the data and identifying the similar responses. A threat to concurrent validity may exist due to the interviews not occurring at the same time in addition to the fact children of parents interviewed were not in the same grade (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). This means some of the discrepancy in the answers is due to the student’s maturity level. There was no recording of grade level data. Construct validity measurement related content of the responses. In other words, the responses provided the data sought.

### **Conclusion**

A problem identified at my local school was that academically able students were not choosing AP classes. In an effort to understand this choice, I conducted a qualitative

research study. The study required interviews of parents of capable students, which were identified from school data and invited to participate. Upon agreement, participants' interviews occurred after signing appropriate consent forms. Upon interview completion, transcriptions followed of the audio tapes. Recurring themes identified a project to address this problem. This project focuses on parental awareness of the benefits of their children completing AP classes. In this project, provided encouragement, through various means, will help these parents make the most influential academic choices. Section 3 includes the chosen project and justification for its potential success.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The genre of this project will be a professional development for parents of academically able students. The purpose of this study was to examine possible causes for low enrollment in AP classes at the parent choice school under study, despite many students meeting the requirements to be in the classes. The reason that prevailed as the most influential was parent involvement. The goal of the professional development for the parents is for them to learn about AP classes and then receive the skills and support to encourage their children to participate successfully in these classes. A specific learning outcome is to empower the parents to help their children with academic studies using informed processes. As the target audience is the parents of academically able students, the professional development will have to occur at times outside of normal school hours because most of these parents work during school hours.

One major theme throughout the data was eight of the parents knew nothing about AP classes. After I shared information about the classes and their benefits, these parents indicated their willingness to encourage their children's enrollment in AP classes. This theme is important to note as it enforces the idea that parents' desires for their children to succeed academically influences their decision to place their child in to parent choice schools. Subsequently, the parents confirmed AP class enrollment would be higher if they knew about the classes. Next, I needed to determine the most beneficial way to deliver AP class information to the parents.

Another major theme present within the data was the fact that parents did not receive notices sent home from the school. Four of the parents admitted they got most of their information from the website. This led to brainstorming about the best communication method to reach the parents. After reflection, all 10 parents agreed the notification of the AP classes had to come directly from the school to them, eliminating the student from the process. Because many of the students' families were low SES and did not have Internet access at home, an opportunity for the parents to come to the school and learn about the courses offered seems the most beneficial. Improvements in educational practices occur when the stakeholders (parents) are directly active in the process (Williams, 2013). The school under study currently has a parent-meeting requirement which allows these face-to-face meetings to occur.

At the school under study, regular parent meetings are part of the requirement for enrollment. School staff offers a variety of courses at these parent meetings to help with all aspects of parenting. The first session of the professional development workshop includes a portion of time allowing the parents to interact with the teachers. The second session is generally geared toward parenting skills. Topics vary and include (among other topics) financial awareness, college processes, anger management, and so forth. The second session would be a good place to let the parents know about AP classes. It will also afford an opportunity to offer suggestions and support for parents to encourage their children to successfully enroll in and complete AP courses. As this training will take place during the first week of school; the parents will still have time to encourage their

children to enroll in AP courses for the year, as registration remains open through the second week of school.

### **Description and Goals**

The project will be a PLC professional development for parents of academically able students. PLCs have “increased efficacy and collective responsibility... [as well as] enhanced [student] motivation and academic improvement” (Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012, p. 285). The problem was that academically able students are not partaking in AP classes in an urban, parent choice school. The parents’ interviews determined why this was occurring. The overwhelming response was that the parents did not know the school offered AP classes as well as the fact they seldom received written school correspondence from their children. The professional development personally informs the parents about the AP classes. The goal of the project is for these parents to encourage their children’s enrollment in AP classes and establish an ongoing support group.

### **Rationale**

PLCs increase student academic levels (Hall, 2013; Kristmanson, Lafargue, & Culligan, 2011). These groups are the latest educational innovation that actually creates change in current practices (Richardson, 2011). A PLC is present when a group of professionals engages in ongoing inquiry, sharing, and acting to improve status (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). An individual becomes a professional in the field when he or she is “suitably educated and [part of a] skilled workforce” (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 406). At the age students are eligible for AP classes, parents have been parenting for at least 15 years. Hord (2009) defined a professional as one who is “responsible” for a student’s



education (p. 42). This qualifies parents for the classification of professionals in their field. Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) noted effective PLCs should occur at the school. They are “our best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement” (DuFour, 2007, p. 3).

PLCs are able to awaken individuals’ responsibility toward a common, shared goal (Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield, & Dupree, 2012). Due to their exploratory nature, they are adaptable to every age group (Mokharti, Thoma, & Edwards, 2009). Finland successfully used a collaborative group format to increase student academic achievement since 2004 (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). Johnson (2010) discussed the importance of people being able to reflectively discuss their situations to evaluate and fix problem areas. PLCs are able to connect professionals’ knowledge with others (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2012). It is through this connection the most productive change occurs. There is a notion that participants in any PLC will lose their individuality; however, PLCs have no distinct leader, which will help alleviate this possibility (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). In fact, the members will “continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire” (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 406).

DuFour (2014) noted any type of professional development must be “ongoing ... collective ... job-embedded ... [and] results-oriented” (p. 31). By engaging parents in a PLC, they will be better able to promote higher student academic achievement. PLCs can raise the educational goals, accomplishments, and comprehension levels of students (Edglossary.org, 2014). Dufour further claimed PLCs can “support the ongoing adult learning need for continual improvement” (DuFour, 2014, p. 31). PLCs are a good

component to commonly link multiple parenting styles and approaches (Kristmanson et al., 2011). Parents of students in parent choice schools want to help their students achieve as much as they can. A PLC can give parents the tools they lack to implement this goal and influence changes within their children's lives (Owens, 2010; Williams, 2013). In PLCs, the entire group becomes a resource which has a vast knowledge and experience base (Linder et al., 2012). The group has "a positive impact on ... student learning" (Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012, p. 285). Through this base, removed barriers can help students reach higher academic potential.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **History of PLCs**

In 1916, educators perceived schools as both social and educational institutions (Dewey, 1916). Follett (1924) developed a premature version of a PLC in the workforce. In 1936, educators acknowledged teachers also accomplished more by working as a group (Denver Public Schools, 1936). In 1941, teacher workshops began to focus on allowing teachers to work together in advancing students' educational success (Griffin, 1941). Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory and zone of proximal development theory note the importance of group communities in helping individuals' reach their goals. He discovered people needed social interaction with others in order to grow. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1989) noted schools were more successful when teacher collaboration was present.

Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) defined a community as a comprehensive whole, construed of individuals who are interdependent and share the same interests. Hammond

(as cited in Hord, 1997) concluded group decision making was a major element in creating school restructuring. As a result, in 1997, Hord used the term *learning community* to describe these strategizing sessions. She further defined the main goal of the group as being solely to benefit the students (Hord, 1997). DuFour (2004) summarized the goal of PLCs as having three core purposes: (a) focus on student learning, (b) collaboration for greater input, and (c) focus on results. Teachers are multifaceted people who employ multiple approaches for all of their students to achieve success (Bullough, 2007). PLCs are “a key ingredient for improving schools” (Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012, p. 281). They put educational focus on learning instead of on teaching (DuFour, 2014).

### **Components of PLCs**

PLCs create “a unifying force” amongst its participants (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009). Hord (2009) said they represent “the context most supportive of ... learning” (p. 40). They have some common components: shared leadership, common vision and values, peer collaboration, collective learning and creativity, and a tangible measurement of desired outcomes (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Hord, 1997; Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012; Owens, 2010; Richardson, 2011; Roy & Hord, 2006). Gruenbaun (2010) stated these groups must “incorporate collaboration toward helping students with learning” while “assum(ing) individual responsibility to take action to build...” (para. 2). Each of these attributes work together to increase student academic success while minimizing unnecessary tasks (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012). In addition, the PLC’s regular routine must include these

attributes as they provide enhancement when implemented (Heirdsfield, Lamb, & Spry, 2010; Hord, 1997).

**Shared leadership.** PLCs work as a concerted effort. No one person is more important than another. This is the concept of shared leadership. This type of leadership encourages individual ownership, which empowers the members to not only feel responsible for the positive outcome, but also feel as if they are a valuable member of the group (Owens, 2010). In PLCs, there is encouragement for everyone to share problems and any solution suggestions to shepherd “a cultural shift in a school” (Richardson, 2011, p. 29). Also, a melding of individuals into a collective container of knowledge is necessary (Avila, 2009). Likewise, the members of the PLC group develop its goals. Shared purpose develops from shared leadership (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). This promotes great increases in student academic achievement (Leane, 2014). It is important to note that conflicts may occur, but “engagement in conflict is a central feature of successful learning communities” (Rinke, 2009, p. 9).

**Common vision and values.** Aimed at enhancing student achievement, members of a successful PLC must have a common vision and equal values (Owens, 2010; Seo & Han, 2012). Avila (2009) believed PLCs should begin by creating a social investment tone between the school and the parents. The many characteristics of the various members can only find success on a given task if they all agree on the priority of the tasks (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009). Added educational value occurs when members learn from each other (Rinke, 2009). Next, the members should jointly analyze other groups with increased student academic efficacy (Edglossary, 2014). The agreement of

importance, for a given task, guides the group to reach the best decision (Williams, 2013). The diversity and various expertise levels of the group members balance out so the group can choose the most beneficial goals and subsequent course of action (Hord, 2009). In other words, the group is able to make the wisest choice for outcome measurement.

**Peer collaboration.** Another vital component for a successful PLC is peer collaboration. Gruenbaum (2010) stated collaboration is key to maintaining a successful PLC. In order for sincere peer collaboration, however, members must respect each other (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). The other components support this respect; as to be a member, one must believe in the group's mission (Hord, 2009). Likewise, the fact all members are professionals in the subject ensures each member will honor the input from the other members. Peer collaboration leads to active seeking of new solutions and embracing of new ideas (DuFour, 2007; Rinke, 2009). This search for solutions, beyond the normal status quo, is what makes PLCs succeed beyond individual levels.

Subsequently, a supportive atmosphere must exist to have a successful PLC. Attitudes influence the tone of the group, which is why there should be concise dialect (Owen, 2010). If a majority of the members are for the group, then the group will fulfill its goal (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Due to the creative nature of PLCs, it is essential members feel supported to alleviate their fears of suggesting a wrong answer (Linder et al., 2012). PLCs must evaluate teacher, student, and parent contentment (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2012; Seo & Han, 2012). A clear understanding that all input is valuable must exist in order for new techniques to emerge, as the design of PLCs is to leverage "existing structures ... rather than transforming them" (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 417). Group

members are more acceptable of different viewpoints when there is a cohesive understanding that all viewpoints are necessary to complete the task (Dooner, Mandzuk, & Clifton, 2008). The supportive atmosphere must positively nourish this environment for students to benefit from the PLC. In other words, “the group learns how to learn together” (Hord, 2009, p. 40).

**Collective learning and creativity.** It is the concept of peer collaboration which leads to another major component of PLCs, collective learning. “Opportunities for shared reflection” sustain the PLC’s mission and further their knowledge (Owens, 2010, p. 49). This method of reflection leads to the group moving from reflection to definitive action (Heirdsfield, Lamb, & Spry, 2010). Both adults and students learn in PLCs (Richardson, 2011). Collective learning is the process by which members of the PLC continue to improve on their prior knowledge (Williams, 2013). Based on the agreed goals, and any reported problems, members seek extra knowledge. The commitment of the members to the group, drives them to seek alternative methods to ensure common goals are met (Owens, 2010). “Struggle can be treated as a sign of intellectual and emotional engagement in learning” (Avila, 2009, p. 313). PLCs experiment with various educational strategies in an attempt to find the one which will further their common goals.

Based on individual reflection, PLCs follow a member dialogue format (Leane, 2014). Likewise, there is less room for unfounded assumptions as members become more familiar with each other (Dooner, Mandzuk, & Clifton, 2008). This form of action in research design expands and stretches the group members’ current knowledge (Avila,

2009; Edglossary.org, 2014). This empowerment also affords for new, innovative educational practices. As each member adds to the discussion, the PLC determines its next course of action (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009). It also ensures the consideration of every member's thoughts and concerns (Williams, 2013). The outcomes of the directional courses undergo collective examination to determine if there is a need for further changes (Heirdsfield, Lamb, & Spry, 2010). Members of these groups feel "empowered to ... become change agents" (Rinke, 2009, p. 8). Collective learning techniques encourage student to increase achievement as they apply their learning to what is relevant in their life (Gruenbaum, 2010).

### **Tangible Measurement of Desired Outcomes**

The goal of a PLC is to increase student academic achievement. It is "an effective strategy for promoting long-term ... growth" (Linder et al., 2012). To know a PLC is meeting its goal, identification of tangible measurements is paramount (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). PLCs must have results in mind to formulate and execute their mission (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Broken down into segments, these results help the group reach its final goal. The measurements do not have to be traditional (such as tests). Members of the PLC are able to evaluate their effectiveness by results, instead of just relying on theory (Seo & Han, 2012). The uniqueness of each PLC is the measurements tailor fit the needs and demographics of the students it serves (Owens, 2010). Examining individual outcomes allows the members to formulate specific interventions (Richardson, 2011). This tactic is "an important piece of the equation for continuous (educational) improvement" (Williams, 2013, p. 39).

## **Implementation**

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The main ingredient for a successful PLC is a small group (between five and twelve) of professionals who share a common interest. The group members must also have a desire to reach a common goal based on their shared interest. Although there is no leader, per se, a group facilitator keeps the group focused to ensure the goals are met and analyzes outcomes for additional adjustments (Seo & Han, 2012). The facilitator will also make sure accurate minutes are kept and that all assignments and strategies are clear (Seo & Han, 2012). The only other resource necessary for the PLC is a place to meet.

The school under study is a high school with available classrooms for the PLC's usage. The administrator, upon approval of the PLC, should provide a classroom for the group to use. That person should also make sure the availability times and dates for the classroom are clear. The school under study has a strong parenting program. Parent requirements include visits to their child's classroom at least once per semester and attendance at monthly parent meetings. The PLC should flourish as the parents already come to the school on a regular basis.

### **Potential Barriers**

Richardson (2011) noted that the "stairway to PLC heaven is steep and littered with resistance and distractions" (p. 28). One potential barrier would be poor implementation or facilitation of the PLC. If the members do not understand the purpose or structure of the PLC, discouragement may occur which could negatively affect attendance. Another potential barrier would occur if the membership or focus of the PLC



exhibits disorganization or lack of focus. The core component of PLCs is their focus on a common task (DuFour, 2014). Other identified barriers are 1) if there is a perception that the PLC is a burdensome or time-consuming obligation; 2) if the members have negative experiences with each other; 3) if there is a lack of support from the school for the PLC; or 4) if the PLC has no observable, measurable outcome (Richardson, 2011). These barriers can be overcome with careful planning and accountability. Also, alerting the group members of these barriers can help curtail them.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

In order to get the parents involved in the PLC, they must be aware of its existence. As noted in the findings from the interviews, communication must be directly from the school to the parent. This being the case, I will develop and mail flyers detailing the PLC (including its purpose) to the parents of identified students. I will also hang posters of the same flyers inside the school, as well as on a ramp all of the parents pass as they drop off and pick up their students. In the past, at the school under study, many parents acknowledged they receive school information when passing posters on the ramp. A school technology teacher will post the information for the PLC formation on the school's website. Parents visit this site often as they monitor their children's grades. Parents with no internet access at home are able to use the computer at their place of employment or the local library. Additionally, the principal will send out a notice on his school group text about the parent meeting and the planned PLC.

The development of the flyers, submission for administrator approval, and ordering of the posters will take place one month before the PLC's training workshop. As

our school makes the posters in-house, they will be ready within three days. Thus, hanging of the posters will occur three weeks before the PLC. At the same time, the school designee will load the PLC information onto the school website. It will run for three weeks as well. The principal will send an initial group text two weeks before the PLC parent meeting. The week of the PLC parent meeting, the principal will send out a group text reminder message with information about the meeting and referencing the posters outside of the school.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

One member of the PLC will be the facilitator. Upon completion of the training, the group will vote one of the parents to be the facilitator. That person will be in charge of contacting the school administrator for permission to have the PLC (Doerr, 2009). The facilitator will also arrange for meeting places and times, along with coordinating completion of the flyers, posters, and web announcements (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). The facilitator serves as the liaison between school staff and the PLC. He will guide the discussion and decision making while ensuring dialogue is non-combative and on task (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014).

As mentioned, the school administrator will provide the facilities for the PLC. He is the one who approves the web messages and group texts. The technology teacher is responsible for posting the web message. The school secretary redirects any parent phone calls to the facilitator. Lastly, the facilities workers ensure the PLC has access to the building and classroom at the appointed times.

## **Project Evaluation**

As the goal of this PLC will be to enable academically able students to successfully complete AP courses, its objective is to find answers to certain questions. The questions will guide the evaluation plan. Some common PLC questions that relate to our goal are: 1) how can we get more involved in our child's course selection, 2) how can we ensure our child gets the additional long term support they will need when they experience "difficulty in learning", and 3) how can we support each other when our child wants to withdraw from the class (Seo & Han, 2012, p. 283)? Thus the evaluation is goals-based and summative. The number of students that enroll in AP classes for the first time will be recorded. At the end of the course, the students will be analyzed to see which ones maintained the course and successfully passed the exit exam.

### **Evaluation Justification**

Goal-based evaluations measure incremental goals, which are motivational in nature (van Osselear & Janiszewski, 2012). They measure over time and consist of a group of evaluations. Whereas, usage of outcome based evaluations measures the end result (van Osselear & Janiszewski, 2012). The PLC's overall goal is to help the students successfully complete AP courses. The achievement of this goal will be evident upon the completion of the course. Thus, a goals based evaluation is the best choice for this project.

### **Outcomes and Performance Measures**

The outcomes of PLCs require approaches which use evidence as their proof (Doerr, 2009). Therefore, the outcomes and performance measures must include an

evaluation of the evidence based on the PLC's goals. Student success is a direct measurement instrument which can ascertain the effectiveness of our PLC's goal. The number of members that begin and end the PLC does not matter. The number of meetings the PLC holds does not matter. What matters is the number of students that enroll in an AP course and successfully complete that course.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals for Key Stakeholders**

Enactment of all outcomes of the PLC must happen outside the classroom, as parents have no direct authority in the classroom. This outcome can be monitored throughout the school year by keeping abreast of one's own child's progress throughout the year. If a student is experiencing difficulty with a lesson, the traditional PLC can brainstorm ways to get the student extra support (Hall, 2013). A PLC, though not able to directly influence classroom practices, can research new ideas while sharing learned practices the parents can use outside of the classroom to support their child's educational learning. If the student is contemplating dropping the course, the PLC can devise a plan to help the student overcome their obstacles. All of the students identified to join the AP courses possess the academic ability to succeed. Therefore, the PLC's main job throughout the year will be to sustain student interest and enthusiasm for the courses outside of the classroom. They will undergird the educational process occurring inside the classroom.

## **Implications Including Social Change**

### **Local Community**

The findings on this study contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of PLCs with non-professionally trained individuals as members, specifically parents. PLC members express that being a part of the group has allowed them increased ownership of their children's education (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009; Doerr, 2009; Hairon & Climmock, 2012). Parents receive empowerment when they believe children want their involvement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). This has a direct correlation to increased self-efficacy in the parents, which leads to higher academic standards and better academic success for their child (Graham, 2011). PLC members (in this case the parents) also express they feel better equipped to handle the academic needs of students (Gruenbaun, 2010). As a result, parents are able to take a more upfront stance on education and see the direct results of their personal involvement.

### **Far-Reaching**

The parents in this PLC will gain a boost their confidence, which may lead to self-empowerment. It may also lead to the students aspiring to higher academic achievements. This may well cause a shift in the thinking paradigm of the inner-city, low SES neighborhood residents, which will possibly spread to other neighborhoods. My city is currently trying to bridge the gap between the affluent neighborhoods in our northern sector and the poor neighborhoods in our southern sector. One of their main focuses is education. This PLC could help uphold that focus, thus helping to close this gap. On a

broader scale, a city-wide PLC could build stronger relationships between the northern and southern sectors.

### **Conclusion**

In Section 3, there was a discussion of the proposed project. This discussion included a review of the literature concerning PLCs. There was also a description of the proposed project. Included were justifications of why the PLC is a good choice to address the problem, along with how the PLC can empower parents increased involvement in their child's education. This section also included a plan for implementing the project. Also included is a discussion of potential barriers and a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the project, exists. Section 4 will include my personal reflections and conclusions about the proposed project.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section includes a discussion on the strengths and limitations of the project. Also included are possible alternative approaches to the project. Next, there is information concerning the scholarly nature and learning gained from the project. I also reflect upon the importance of the work. A discussion of future implications and recommendations for future research ends this section.

### **Project Strengths**

The purpose of the study was to determine why academically able students shunned enrollment in AP courses within parent choice schools. The data revealed the fact of parents not being aware of the AP classes as a major contributor to the problem. I have proposed a PLC to keep the parents informed and involved in their children's educational process. One strength of the PLC project is the parents will meet as a collective force. This will give parents additional support to help their children succeed.

A second strength of this project is it will allow parents to receive information first hand. Another strength of the project is its design; the PLC will accommodate all parent needs as it allows them to offer physical and mental support. At the same time, the PLC will enable the parents to adapt practices as unorthodox situations occur. The group element of the project is a strength which allows the parents to pool all of their cognitive resources (learned and experienced) to determine the best feasible solution for their demographic area. Another strength of the project is that it utilizes parents of students

with high academic skills, which indicates parents' prior active involvement in their children's education (Hayes, 2011).

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

One limitation of the study is that it does not directly address students enrolled in an AP course who withdrew. This could limit the project because the parents of these students would possibly not join the PLC, depending on each child's reason for withdrawing. A further limitation to the project is that the parents have to physically attend the meetings. Due to the low income demographics of the neighborhood, many parents may work more than one job, which makes them unavailable to join the PLC. Although the school could still share AP course information with these parents, they would not receive the additional support and remedies the PLC offers. Another limitation to the project is the possible exclusion of non-English speaking parents from the PLC. Furthermore, there is clarification regarding the cultural differences that could stifle the creative input of the group.

Barriers to successful PLCs include "lack of time, the isolated nature of the profession [parents do not live together], and ... divergent points of view" (Lujan & Day, 2010, p. 10). The component of shared vision addresses these shortcomings. Two other limitations to this study are the size and type of the school under study. Larger public schools have more parents, which will not lead to a small, focused PLC. It would be harder for larger PLCs to agree on common goals. Also, public schools are not parent choice schools. The parents at these schools are typically not as involved in their students' education. Thus, parent attendance at meetings is not sufficient enough to



provide a good representation of the student population. Another limitation would be parent buy-in that this is a worthwhile goal to pursue. Some parents may not want to upset their children by getting them to perform outside of their comfort zone.

### **Alternative Approaches**

#### **Address the Problem Differently**

Alternative projects to creating a PLC, based on the work of the study, would still center on the parent. For instance, there could be a 1-day seminar to inform parents about AP classes and their advantages. However, the 1-day seminar would not offer long-term support as the students encounter challenges within the classroom. Another alternative project would be to simply highlight the courses on the school website. This approach, though, would not work for the families that do not have access to the internet.

#### **Alternative Definition and Solutions**

Instead of considering ways to influence parental involvement, I could explore other reasons for the presence of the identified problem. For instance, interviews of the students would reveal why they do not take AP classes. However, the maturity level of children may not expose valid reasons. Another way to address the problem is to interview school personnel. Teachers could disclose why they choose certain types of students and overlook others for AP class placement or counselors could reveal why they do not place more emphasis on students taking AP courses. Likewise, administrators could divulge why AP courses are not an emphasis in their educational platform.

## Scholarship

Scholarship is a combination of three components: detection, incorporation, and implementation (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). An exemplification of these characteristics is present within this project study. The identification of a problem and further research validated that the problem existed while helping to discover its origin. The research determined a project that would address the problem and possibly fix it. Development of the project occurred, through additional research, and a plan for execution emerged. Parents tend to allow their high school students more freedom in course selection, because they are trying to aid in the natural maturity process. However, parents must continue at least marginal involvement with student course selections throughout their children's educational development.

While considering which type of project to develop, I conducted extensive research using materials from the Walden Library site, Google Scholar, and JStor. After studying as many articles as I could, the data led to the development of a project to minimize the problem. This project also required extensive research for its identification and its implementation. The project identified was to conduct training for parents. This training would help the parents establish a PLC for ongoing support and problem solving. In developing the training, I identified a training workshop format that would fulfill the needs of this project. In doing so, I also had to ascertain different workshop activities that increase participant awareness and retention. This process caused me to be cognizant of time constraints and workshop delivery organization.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Before embarking on this project study journey, I possessed limited knowledge of the attributes of a scholar. After completing the process, I can now appreciate the precision and detail entailed in being a scholar. I also did not comprehend the amount of time and detail required to identify a problem, research its possible cause(s), research methods to possibly fix it, as well as develop and implement a project. For this project, I had to fully understand the problem and factor in the demographics of the parents. Likewise, the cultural differences of the parents were a consideration in the development of a project that would benefit all stakeholders. Another factor was obtaining permission from the school under study to support the project. This process also increased my cognitive processes as I stretched them to develop multiple, relevant workshops to complete the project.

### **Leadership and Change**

In today's society, education is a key factor to financial independence (Kyung-Nyun, 2013). The design of this project study assists children from families with lower SES achieve this goal by allowing them an opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. AP classes also help students develop the academic cognitive skills needed to achieve collegiate success (graduation). With a college diploma, these inner-city youth will become productive members of society who are able to financially support themselves (Kyung-Nyun, 2013). However, research has shown that paramount to these students' academic success is parent involvement (Rogers, et. al, 2009). The project developed in this study, a PLC, will encourage parental involvement in their children's

educational success. The project may also increase parents' confidence, which will encourage other parents' active involvement as well.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Conducting the interviews brought awareness of the problem to the school. Before I began this project, there was minimal focus on AP classes. Student monitoring was simply to ensure they met State standards for graduation. The only students in AP courses were those with natural intrinsic motivation. Since then, there has been a shift in focus at my school toward AP classes. More teachers are discussing this option with students and the counselors are now recommending these courses to students. Similarly, administration now expresses a desire to implement more AP courses by seeking highly qualified teachers for the AP courses.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As part of the study, I created a deliverable project based on the research and findings from this study. I chose to develop a PLC for parents which shares information about AP courses and provides support for continued academic success. The administration team at the school under study adopted my project and plan on implementing it during the spring semester to increase student enrollment in AP classes next school year. The students that sign up for, and successfully complete, AP courses will have a better chance of acceptance and success at institutes of higher learning. This will bring about a change in their economic status which could create a ripple effect throughout their neighborhood. Also, the school will receive higher State academic rankings, which increases their spending budget for more needed classroom resources.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

To give a project value, it must have meaning to the stakeholders (Reynolds & Field, 2013). The stakeholders in this situation are the parents. Thus, the project had to focus on empowering them to develop socially conscious children. I likewise knew the project had to be accessible to the parents (despite their various schedules and different cultural attributes). While exploring the possibilities, I deduced that a development training would be the best course of action to get the PLC functioning.

This conclusion led to thoughts of what types of information to include in the training at what depth. Not to mention, there had to be an easily accessible training facility for the parents. Engaging the parents through multiple types of activities was also a challenge. I had to look at other workshops and research group activities to find a variety of ideas adaptable to my topic. I learned that there is a lot of preparation work that goes into developing a project.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

A potential impact for positive social change would be the increase in academic rigor level of the students. Increased academic rigor enables the students for college success (College Board, 2012). It also correlates with higher maturity levels in adolescents (College Board, 2012). Teenagers make many decisions based on low maturity levels. Once students mature, they make better choices about their future. Without doubt, the attitudes and behavior of the AP students could possibly reduce drop-out rates as the students realize their academic potential. They can aspire to receive a

higher education. Crime levels in the neighborhood of the school under study change as student focus shifts more towards education and less towards socializing.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The school under study is located in an inner-city, poverty-stricken neighborhood. Most of its students and their families have low SES. This means that many of the parents are either not working at all, or only working at minimum wage jobs. This indicates that these parents do not have a college degree. Also, schools in poverty-stricken neighborhoods have lower amounts of teaching resources. Education improves these deficiencies.

There is a high drop-out and crime rate in this neighborhood as well. Studies show that many high school drop-outs do so because they do not feel enabled to successfully complete their high school coursework (Schoeneberger, 2012). AP classes, with the support of the PLC, will empower students to feel enabled and stay in high school. The lack of financial resources in the neighborhood leads to high crime rates. The students who successfully complete AP courses and move on to get a college degree increase the financial resources in the neighborhood, which could possibly remove some of the need for crime.

### **Other Implications**

Another implication for this project study is that the AP classes and PLC is only a beginning to causing a social change with these students and their families. Students that are struggling in regular education classrooms would also benefit from a similar PLC catered to their needs. The interview process opened the doors of communication towards

development of more student focused projects. As student needs develop, these PLCs will give parents more input in their child's specific educational experience. It will also allow parents to feel more intricately involved in their child's future.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

I recommend that future practice of educators include more hands-on parental involvement. A qualitative study examining the most comfortable components of parent involvement would be beneficial. Likewise, a study that examines the reasons why parents are not more hands-on with their children's studies would be beneficial. Perhaps, the educational realm can develop ways to increase parenting time by offering to help with household chores and provide training for the parents to obtain better paying jobs. Either of these options would allow the parent more time to interact with their child and be a part of school PLCs. On a broader scale, a city-wide PLC could build stronger relationships between the northern and southern sectors.

### **Conclusion**

I began this project study by identifying a problem at my local setting. Section 1 introduced the problem, its rationale, and evidence that the problem exists. This led to the development of two guiding research questions. These two questions led to a review of literature development which indicated the best type of research to ascertain possible causes of the problem. Implications from the research are also present.

Section 2 identified the methodology used to conduct the qualitative study phase of this project study. There is also justification as to why a qualitative research study was the best approach to this problem. A description of the qualitative process ensues, which

includes the process of choosing, accessing, and interviewing participants. A discussion of each interview question follows along with its answers from the research project. A dissemination of the transcribed data determines a project to address the problem.

Section 3 included the actual project proposed for implementation. Listed also is a description of the PLC and its goals. The rationale for choosing the PLC project and a review of the literature about the project are likewise incorporated into this section. Furthermore, this section includes a plan for the project implementation, in addition to guidelines evaluating the project. This section also contains identification of the project implications, both locally and far-reaching.

In section 4, I discussed the strengths and limitations of the project, alternative approaches, scholarship, project development, leadership and change, my reflections, and implications with directions for future research. One of the most prevalent impacts of this study was my growth as a scholar. Another major impact was the way this project study increased student emphasis at the school under study. The parents have become aware that they need more information about school programs. This will lead to social change at the local level.

There is a correlation between PLCs and school gratification (Seo & Han, 2012). The goal of this study was to encourage academically able students to enroll in AP classes. My hope is that the PLC, which is the project that emanated from the research study, establishes a successful implementation of this change while incorporating additional parenting techniques. It will definitely enhance school gratification. I now



fully experience the joy of being a lifelong learner and an initiator for social change,  
thanks to this doctoral study.

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## Appendix A: The Project

The project is the establishment of a Parental Learning Community (PLC), a program for parents focusing on increasing AP class enrollment. The second element of this PLC will involve coaching parents on ways to increase their parental involvement in their child's course selection and educational path. Subsequently, the third element will enable parents to provide the support needed for their child's increased academic success. Participants will join the PLC by signing up at the school or sending an email to the facilitator. The purpose of this PLC is to equip our youth with better preparation for the future.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this PLC is to provide parents with enough fortitude to encourage their child to enroll in, and successfully complete, AP courses. The parents will receive additional resources to use if different situations occur and their child begins to experience discouragement in the higher level courses. Furthermore, participants will learn the benefits of AP classes in relation to their child's academic future and adulthood. Shared information will include how this level of rigorous education could also ultimately uplift their family and neighborhood, but specifically their children. Lastly, the participants will become an ongoing network in which they continue to support each other throughout the duration of the AP-study.

### **Goals**

The goals for this PLC include:



- The participants will review and analyze the benefits students receive when they take AP courses. During this time, participants will also learn about the AP program and all of its intricacies (including the AP courses offered with their requirements and college credit received).
- The participants will understand the social effect of rigor and its influence on adulthood. During this time, participants will analyze rigor in different academic settings. They will learn how to break rigorous exercises down into manageable parts. Participants will utilize these skills as they undergird their child's success in AP courses.
- The participants will comprehend the value of their continued involvement in their child's course selection and completion. Participants will become aware of barriers, which limited their previous involvement, and develop solutions for future practices.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The learning outcome for the PLC is for parents to obtain knowledge of AP classes and receive instructional support for their child to successfully complete the classes. Increasing the self-efficacy level of the parents will help to achieve this.

Murdock (2013) discovered that there is a close correlation between parental self-efficacy and the role of parenting. Parents influence the students. If the parents increase their self-efficacy regarding education, their child will increase in educational self-efficacy. Focusing on building positive self-efficacy will empower the participants to get involved in their child's educational process (Murdock, 2013). Self-efficacy also

equips parents with the necessary mindset to support their child as they embark on this more rigorous learning path. Participants will understand the benefits of AP classes and discover ways for their children to prosper in high rigor classrooms. More so, participants will gain valuable parenting knowledge that engages high academic students.

### **Target Audience**

The target audience of the PLC is parents of students that are in the National Honor Society and not participating in AP classes. This means parents of students that score the highest rating on the state assessment may join. These are parents of students with indications of adjusting to the more rigorous AP class curriculum. This is necessary as these classes are taught at a higher level of understanding (College Board, 2012). The meeting of these parents with a school personnel facilitator will promote change.

### **Timeline**

This PLC training will consist of 3 sessions per day. Each session will last for 120 minutes. The sessions will continue for three days. The timeline, which includes activities for each day's sessions, for this PLC training is as follows:

#### **Day 1 Session 1: Parental Purpose for Enrolling Students at our School**

- As of 2012, AP course enrollment only comprised about 27% of students worldwide (College Board, 2012). However, more than 21 million students, or 65.9%, attended postsecondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). The school under study's state testing data identifies that over 40% of the students exhibit high academic

qualities. Data from the students' eighth grade year reveals the students currently in AP classes are not the only academically successful students on campus. Even though parents and guardians choose to enroll students in this parent choice school, the students are not taking advantage of advanced level academics.

- **Activity:** Examine the mission statement and list reasons why parents enrolled their child in this parent choice school. All participants will divide into groups of three and given a copy of the school's mission statement. They will share how the mission statement (which they all read prior to enrollment) affected their decision to enroll their student at the school. They will number the three mission statement parts in order of importance to them. Participants will then brainstorm other reasons parents have for student enrollment at the school. The groups will each prepare a presentation board with their list of choices and at least three sentences explaining their numbering. The facilitator will record each group's choices. The groups will then share their alternative ideas about why parents enroll their child at the school (if any).
- Parents who choose to put their children in a school other than their normal neighborhood public school want advantages regular schools cannot offer (Grolnick et al., 2009). If the advantage is academics, then these students should be taking AP classes (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Parents are able to discern if their child is learning at school or not (Williams Shanks & Destin, 2009). The parents who understand education is not just a need but also a necessity for a better life, take actions to ensure their children receive a quality education

(Williams Shanks & Destin, 2009). Ideally, it is reasonable these parents would take advantage of AP classes to obtain this goal. High poverty rates in the local setting would indicate a low post-graduation rate (Deming & Dynarski, 2009). Studying this problem will help the low SES students acquire college readiness skills and college credits which will help them gain acceptance into college and receive scholarships.

### **Day 1 Session 2: Parent Educational Influence**

- Parents are a defining force in the student course decision-making process. They affect students' achieving higher academic scores and choices to take higher level cognitive classes (Dweck, 2010; Grolnick et al., 2009; Hayes, 2011; Heckman, 2011; Rogers et al., 2009). This is true for both mothers and fathers. Supportive and nurturing parents promote higher self-efficacy within the student (Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012). Students perceive they can achieve success in AP classes simply because their parents believe they can. Studies link a direct correlation between parental support at home and school achievement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Rogers et al., 2009; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Williams Shanks, & Destin, 2009; Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, & Pugh, 2011).
- Activity: What is Your Level of Involvement – Participants will complete a graphic organizer T-chart in which they list their involvement within their child's education during elementary school compared to their current involvement in their child's education during high school. They will rank the importance of each

of their actions on a scale of 1-5, with '1' being not very important and '5' being very important. Parents will then write their entries on sticky notes (without names) and place them on a big T-chart on the wall. Next participants will share their thoughts about the information on the T-chart with a partner. The whole group will then explore these thoughts.

- Epstein (1986) defined parental educational involvement as a parents' "investment of various resources in their child's education" (p. 162). This involvement, then, includes academic and non-academic participation. She categorized parental involvement into five avenues: parenting, helping with homework, communications with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision making (Epstein, 1986). These include a parent showing up at a sports event, volunteering in the classroom, helping their student with homework, making sure the student completes the homework, or simply making sure the students attends school on a regular basis. Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett (1990) established these parental social relationships are vital to student success. Fehrmann et al. (1987) conducted an analysis involving over 28,000 high school students. They confirmed parental involvement is a major contributor to student success. Even while adding other factors, such as homework reminders and television time, a direct correlation established a relationship between parental involvement and student higher educational aspirations. Usher & Kober (2012) specifically identified six tasks parents can do to motivate their students to attain higher aspirations: recognizing student effort, conversing with students,

making a big deal out of any student accomplishment, developing different opportunities for student exploration, acknowledging student accomplishments, and determining feasibly high student academic goals. Parental support works, even if the parent knows nothing about the subjects the students are taking (Grolnick et al., 2009).

### **Day 1 Session 3: Parent Involvement in Secondary School**

- Redding (2006) reported parental involvement in student academics is very beneficial. Rogers et al. (2009) noted the biggest influence parental involvement has on student achievement aspirations is more indirect than direct. Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby (2008) noted parents must have all necessary information in order to make knowledgeable decisions, and many minority parents had no knowledge of AP courses offered at their children's school. Cheung & Pomerantz (2012) observed "children's learning was predictive of children's parent-oriented motivation in school ... which predicted enhanced achievement among students" (p. 9).
- Activity: Prohibitions to Parent Involvement – Participants will watch a TED video and determine whether or not their involvement level, in their child's education, is appropriate (TED, 2012). They will then discuss their reasoning with their table. Each table will then share their thoughts and ideas. As a whole, the group will suggest ways to overcome these challenges and develop verbatim practices for immediate implementation.

- Reflective Piece: Participants will reflect on the information they learned in each section. They will list which parts of the information they found most applicable to their situation. Lastly, they will make a reasonable 'to-do' list of action items they will personally implement immediately.

### **Day 2 Session 1: What are Advanced Placement Classes?**

- The AP program developed as a way to “provide motivated high school students with the opportunity to take college-level courses” (Mo et. al, 2011, p. 354). The pilot program covered eleven subjects. As of 2012, there were 34 AP courses available in 22 different subjects (College Board, 2012). The College Board added Physics I and II in 2014. In 2008, over 3,500 colleges and universities nationwide awarded college credit for passing scores on AP exams (College Board, 2012). Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) discovered the majority of these higher learning institutions were using the exam scores as an indicator of merit to limit the admissions of minority students. In 2012, nearly 4 million students took over 2 million tests to receive the college credit (College Board, 2012). There are many advantages for students who enroll in AP courses. At the high school level, students in AP courses benefit from smaller classes and student-to-teacher ratios (College Board, 2012). AP classes also improve students' attributes and grade point averages for meeting college admissions criterion (College Board, 2012). These students exhibit higher 'college readiness' abilities and are able to bypass remedial college classes, thus saving tuition expenses (College Board, 2012). This also allows students to have an educational mindset which improve their chances

of graduating college successfully (College Board, 2012). As a result, AP students adapt more readily to the rigorous level of college classroom expectations (College Board, 2012). Both the high schools and colleges benefit from an increasing number of students who take AP courses (College Board, 2012). Students gain a higher level of cognitive thinking abilities through ability grouping (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995). Mo et al. (2011) found a direct correlation between students in AP classes and increased college entrance exam test scores.

- Activity: Participants will complete a matching game. In groups of four, they will receive a set of cards listing different educational outcomes. They will sort the outcomes based on if they are a direct result of AP classes or not. The participants will then share their grouping and reasoning with the group. Afterwards, a whole group discussion will occur about why AP classes are or are not good for their child.
- The College Board AP program regulates the subjects taught including the curriculum. For student exams, the College Board is responsible for the content and format (College Board, 2012). This, of course, means they are also responsible for scoring the exams. In addition, The College Board notified students and schools of their exam scores. However, colleges determine whether or not they will accept AP test scores for credit, including what level score they will accept (Moore & Slate, 2010). An AP exam score of 5 is equivalent to an A in the related college course and indicates a student is *extremely well qualified*, a



score of 4 is equivalent to a B and gives a *well qualified* indicator, and a score of 3 is equivalent to a C (College Board, 2012). Unfortunately, most colleges will not consider awarding college credit for a score of 2 or 1, and very few will award college credit for a 3 (College Board, 2012). However, most colleges do not use these scores to determine college admission, as the release of these scores are usually during the summer following the AP exam completion (Geiser & Santelices, 2006). A regular review of college curriculum and semester exams, by the College Board, determines the rating of the scores. The College Board adjusts the scoring rubric to ensure it is closely in sync with what higher level institutions currently expect (College Board, 2012).

### **Day 2 Session 2: Is my Child AP Class Ready?**

- Schultz (2012) said “Advanced Placement courses contribute to the highest level of academic intensity in a high school curriculum” (p. 119). In 2005, the National Center for Educational Accountability released a report on the relationship between AP classes and college graduation (Dougherty, Miller, & Jian, 2006). They concluded AP students passing the exams associated with the classes were the best indicator of their future success in college; although, the percentage was only as high as the teacher’s effectiveness. There was also a direct correlation between AP class students and high school students’ college readiness indices (Dougherty, Miller, & Jian, 2006). Students who take AP courses have a tendency to carry a full college load, which enables them to graduate in a timely manner (Highsmith, 1989). In a previous study, Geiser and Santelices (2004) noted the

number of AP courses on a student's high school transcript did not have the same weight as the number of students who actually passed the exam and received college credit for courses. The National Center for Educational Achievement report recommended using AP classes as an effective method to prepare low income students for higher education success (National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010).

- Activity: Participants will observe actual students in AP classes: "Inside AP Classes at Blue Spring High School" (<http://youtu.be/-iQ9SBMjZ9s>). They will identify and list the attributes they discern within the students showcased. Participants will then share what they discerned with the facilitator and the group. Next, participants will list the attributes on the list their child possesses to establish a correlation between students already taking AP courses and their child.
- The research pinpointed many possible causes of this phenomenon, leading to the conclusion that parental influence seems to have the biggest effect on it. The research implied parents of high academic students not enrolled in AP classes possess no information about the availability and benefits of such classes (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Parental involvement is most important for student motivation when aspiring to higher academic achievement (Bryan, Glynn, & Kittleson, 2011). A qualitative study examining why some parents of academically able students do not encourage their children to enroll in AP classes could potentially increase AP course participation, and have positive social implications for many. Among the many possible long term results, parents

engage more in school activities and students receive better preparation for post-secondary schooling.

### **Day 2 Session 3: Reflection Piece and Homework**

- The goal of the PLC is for the parents to learn about AP classes and then receive the skills and support to encourage their child to successfully participate in the AP classes. A specific learning outcome to empower parents to help their child with academic studies is through informed processes. As the target audience is the parents of academically able students, the PLC will have to occur at times outside of normal school hours. One major theme throughout the data was eight of the parents knew nothing about AP classes. Once they learned of AP classes and their benefits, these parents indicated they would have encouraged their children to enroll in these classes. This theme is important to note as it enforces the idea that parents use parent choice schools to fulfill their desires for their child's academic success. Subsequently, the parents confirmed that AP class enrollment would be higher if they possessed increased knowledge of these classes. The next action item was to determine the most beneficial way to present AP class information to the parents.
- Activity: Participants will read an article about parenting which deals with character and grade point averages in groups of five (Loveandlogic, 2014). Half of the groups of five will be for the information in the article and the other half will be against the information in the article. Two groups of five will hold debates

to ‘convince’ the other side they are correct. Afterwards, participants will share their ‘big idea’ moments with the group.

- Reflection and Homework: Participants will craft a plan to engage their child in the love and logic dialogue they learned and practiced that evening. They will journal the experience and reflect on what they liked or did not like about the process. They will also note what they believed should be different.

### **Day 3 Session 1: What is a PLC?**

- PLCs increase student academic levels (Hall, 2013; Kristmanson, Lafargue, & Culligan, 2011). These groups are the latest educational innovation that actually creates change in current practices (Richardson, 2011). A PLC is present when a group of professionals engages in ongoing inquiry, sharing, and acting to improve status (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). An individual becomes a professional in the field when he or she is “suitably educated and [part of a] skilled workforce” (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 406). At the age students are eligible for AP classes, parents have been parenting for at least 15 years. Hord (2009) defined a professional as one who is “responsible” for a student’s education (p. 42). This qualifies parents for the classification of professionals in their field. Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) noted effective PLCs should occur at the school. They are “our best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement” (DuFour, 2007, p. 3).
- Activity: Participants will be put into six groups and numbered. Each group will receive a different article explaining PLCs. Participants will read the articles individually and highlight key information. They will then discuss their

highlighted items with the group. Next, each numbered person will get with the same numbered person from the other groups and share their information. The facilitator will make a list of the attributes and definition of PLCs.

- PLCs are able to awaken individuals' responsibility toward a common, shared goal (Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield, & Dupree, 2012). Due to their exploratory nature, they are adaptable to every age group (Mokharti, Thoma, & Edwards, 2009). Finland successfully used a collaborative group format to increase student academic achievement since 2004 (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). Johnson (2010) discussed the importance of people being able to reflectively discuss their situations to evaluate and fix problem areas. PLCs are able to connect professionals' knowledge with others (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2012). It is through this connection the most productive change occurs. There is a notion participants in any PLC will lose their individuality; however, PLCs have no distinct leader, which will help alleviate this possibility (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). In fact, the members will "continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire" (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 406).

**Day 3 Session 2: Can Parental Learning Communities Work for Us?**

- DuFour (2014) noted any type of professional development must be “ongoing ... collective ... job-embedded ... [and] results-oriented” (p. 31). By engaging parents in a PLC, they will be better able to promote higher student academic achievement. PLCs can raise the educational goals, accomplishments, and comprehension levels of students (Edglossary.org, 2014). Dufour further claimed PLCs can “support the ongoing adult learning need for continual improvement” (DuFour, 2014, p. 31). PLCs are a good component to commonly link multiple parenting styles and approaches (Kristmanson et al., 2011). Parents of students in parent choice schools want to help their students achieve as much as they can. A PLC can give parents the tools they lack to implement this goal and influence changes within their children’s lives (Owens, 2010; Williams, 2013). In PLCs, the entire group becomes a resource which has a vast knowledge and experience base (Linder et al., 2012). The group has “a positive impact on ... student learning” (Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012, p. 285). Through this base, removed barriers can help students reach higher academic potential.
- Activity: Participants will analyze the attributes of PLCs and match them with their personal correlations. They will create a mock PLC in which their goal is to teach a young child to read. They will be given the books that the child needs to be able to read, along with the current reading level of the child. They will have to journal their thoughts and reactions within the five major components of a PLC (shared leadership, common vision and values, peer collaboration, collective

learning and creativity, and tangible measurement of desired outcomes). The workshop presenter will act as the facilitator.

- Key to the success of PLCs meeting their goals is to have regular meetings (Leane, 2014). They also need sufficient time to fulfill all components of the meeting (Owens, 2010). Moreover, these meetings must allow for the same common courtesy afforded in other meetings (Williams, 2013). Predetermined agendas, based on the group's goals, are useful (Hord, 2009). PLCs create "a unifying force" amongst its participants (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009). Hord (2009) said they represent "the context most supportive of ... learning" (p. 40). They have some common components: shared leadership, common vision and values, peer collaboration, collective learning and creativity, and a tangible measurement of desired outcomes (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Hord, 1997; Kyounghe & You-Kyung, 2012; Owens, 2010; Richardson, 2011; Roy & Hord, 2006). Gruenbaun (2010) stated these groups must "incorporate collaboration toward helping students with learning" while "assum(ing) individual responsibility to take action to build..." (para. 2). Each of these attributes work together to increase student academic success while minimizing unnecessary tasks (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012). In addition, the PLC's regular routine must include these attributes as they provide enhancement when implemented (Heirdsfield, Lamb, & Spry, 2010; Hord, 1997).

**Day 3 Session 3: Establishing and Maintaining our Own PLC**

- The main ingredient for a successful PLC is a small group (between five and twelve) of professionals who share a common interest. The group members must also have a desire to reach a common goal based on their shared interest.  
  
Although there is no leader, per se, a group facilitator keeps the group focused to ensure the goals are met and analyzes outcomes for additional adjustments (Seo & Han, 2012). The facilitator will also make sure accurate minutes are kept and that all assignments are clear (Seo & Han, 2012). The only other resource necessary for the PLC is a place to meet.
- Activity: Participants will make a commitment to establish and maintain a PLC. They will get into a circle and pass a ball of yarn. Each person that receives the ball of yarn will state their intentions towards the PLC as they identify a specific role to take in establishing the group. Some of the commitments may overlap, but participants will understand this is alright. The facilitator will record the commitments for all workshop participants to receive a copy.
- Activity: Participants will reflect on PLCs. They will journal their learned lessons from this day and define their next committed step. This will include a step-by-step list of action items which need completing. Next the participants will complete ‘workshop speed sharing.’ They will partner with another participant and share both a high and low point they experienced during the three day workshop. They will then rotate to another participant until four rotations are complete. They will then journal any final notes they want to remember.



- Activity: Participants will complete an assessment of the PLC training to indicate the relevancy of the training. The facilitator will use the responses to further expand the usefulness of the training. This document is in Appendix B.

During the three days of training, the parents will work in various small group and partner settings to complete the activities. They will work as a collaborative team to complete their tasks. This is one of the attributes of a PLC (Hord, 2009). At the end of the three day training, the participants will complete an evaluation. It will aid in measuring the success of the training.

The PLC training will endow parents with the necessary skills to encourage their children to take AP courses. It will also enable them to support their children as they begin these rigorous courses to obtain college credit. The increase in the number of students that successfully complete AP courses might possibly garner the attention of other area schools and colleges. This will afford all students more opportunities for higher education. It may also lead to additional PLCs which empower parents to be productive members within their child's educational team.

## References

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### Appendix B: PLC Training Evaluation

Thank you for participating in this training to develop a Parental Learning Community (PLC). Please complete the course evaluation to provide valuable feedback that will help improve this training for future presentations. Feel free to critique any aspect of this training that was not to your liking and be specific. Also, please rate each statement below to indicate your opinion.

1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

This PLC development training was relevant to my future. \_\_\_\_\_

I will use at least 85% of the information presented in this training. \_\_\_\_\_

I fully understood the objectives of this training. \_\_\_\_\_

The activities helped improve my understanding of the topics. \_\_\_\_\_

This training increased my knowledge of AP classes. \_\_\_\_\_

This training has increased my commitment to my child's education. \_\_\_\_\_

This training has convinced me to become part of a PLC. \_\_\_\_\_

The pacing of this training was appropriate. \_\_\_\_\_

I would recommend this training to others. \_\_\_\_\_

What would you change about this training? (Please be specific).

What part of this training did you enjoy the most?

## Appendix C: Interview Question Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did you choose to enroll your child in a charter school?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In what ways, if any, do you help your child decide which courses to take?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are your educational goals for your child?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What do you know about the Advanced Placement (AP) program offered at the school?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why have you/have you not encouraged your child to enroll in AP courses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What steps could this school implement to increase your awareness about the courses offered?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What could this school do to encourage your child to enroll in AP courses?

## Appendix D: Mission Statement Evaluation

XXX School Mission Statement:

The Mission of XXX School is to train XXX with life skills for the twenty-first century by establishing strong XXX, XXX training, and a parenting XXX.

- Reasons for enrollment:

Three parts (rank on order of importance):

- Strong XXX –
  - XXX training –
  - Parenting XXX –
- 
- Other reasons for enrollment:

## Appendix E: Parental Involvement T-Chart

1 or 2 Elementary Year Involvement	3	4 or 5 Current Year Involvement

## Appendix F: Educational Outcomes Matching Activity

The following are the outcomes on the cards:

- ❖ be able to distinguish right from wrong
- ❖ have moral integrity
- ❖ have moral courage to stand up for what is right
- ❖ know their strengths and areas for growth
- ❖ believe in their abilities and be able to adapt to change
- ❖ be resilient in the face of adversity
- ❖ be able to cooperate, share, and care for others
- ❖ be able to work in teams and show empathy for others
- ❖ be able to collaborate across cultures and be socially responsible
- ❖ have a lively curiosity about things
- ❖ be creative and have an inquiring mind
- ❖ be innovative and enterprising
- ❖ be able to think for and express themselves confidently
- ❖ be able to appreciate diverse views and communicate effectively
- ❖ be able to think critically and communicate persuasively
- ❖ take pride in their work take responsibility for own learning
- ❖ be purposeful in pursuit of excellence
- ❖ have healthy habits and an awareness of the arts
- ❖ enjoy physical activities and appreciate the arts
- ❖ pursue a healthy lifestyle and have an appreciation for aesthetics”

Reference: Singapore Ministry of Education. (n.d.) *The desired outcomes of education*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/files/desired-outcomes-of-education.pdf>.

## Appendix G: Article Website Addresses

The following are the website addresses for the articles used during the Day 3, Session 1 activity:

1. Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2006). It's everywhere, but what is it? Professional learning communities. *Journal of School Leadership*, 16(5), 491-501.
2. Hord, S. (2007). Professional learning communities. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30(1), 40-43.
3. Lujan, N. & Day, B. (2010). Professional learning communities: Overcoming the Roadblocks. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*. 10-17.
4. Linder, R., Post, G., & Calabrese, K. (2012). Professional learning communities: Practices for successful implementation. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 13-22.
5. DuFour, R. (2007). Professional learning communities: A bandwagon, an idea worth considering, or our best hope for high levels of learning? *Middle School Journal*, 4-8.





## Appendix I: Reading Books and Reading Level

Reading Books Provided for Level D (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Readers):

- ❖ James and the Giant Peach by: Roald Dahl
- ❖ School, Drool, and Other Daily Disasters by: Rachel Vail
- ❖ Stuart Little by: E. B. White
- ❖ Mr. Popper's Penguins by: Richard Atwater
- ❖ The Birthday Ball by: Lois Lowry
- ❖ Binky to the Rescue by: Ashley Spires

Goodreads.com. (2014). *Popular third grade reading list books*. Retrieved from <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/3rd-grade-reading-list>.

Students and their current reading level: (A – Kindergarten, B – 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, C – 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade)

Student	Grade Level
Bugs Bunny	A
Strawberry Shortcake	A
Elmer Fudd	B
Olive Oil	B
Easter Bunny	C
Santa Clause	B
Mickey Mouse	A

## Appendix J: Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of parental involvement in student class choices and level AP class awareness. The researcher is inviting parents of students not enrolled in advanced placement classes to be in the study. This form is part of the process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Alissa D. Russell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to determine how much input parents have in their children’s course selection and whether or not the parents know about the Advanced Placement program.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview (either in person or on the phone).
- The interviews will be no longer than 45-60 minutes.
- One additional visit/conversation/email will be required to verify that what has been recorded on paper is what you meant to say.

Here are some sample questions:

4. Why did you choose to enroll your child in a charter school?
5. In what ways do you help your child decide which courses to take?
6. What would you like to know from your school/district that would help your child achieve his/her educational goals?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Life School Oak Cliff will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset that your children have not been

enrolled in AP classes before now Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Potential benefits to participants of this study would be additional knowledge of increasing student educational goals.

**Payment:**

No payment is associated to this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by being stored in electronic format only. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via [Alissa.russell@waldenu.edu](mailto:Alissa.russell@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

IRB Approval Number: 2014.09.2 3 11:34:31-05'00'

## Appendix K: Letter of Cooperation

Life School Oak Cliff  
4400 S. R. L. Thornton Frwy.  
Dallas, TX 75224  
(214) 413-1612

August 23, 2014

Dear Alissa Russell,

We are pleased to work with you in your capacity as a teacher who will be providing classroom instruction as part of our organization's operations during 7:30am – 4:15pm. We agree to supervise and assume responsibility for these activities within the scope of our regular operations.

We understand that you will also be undertaking a Walden University student researcher role that is separate from your teacher role. In your student researcher role, I authorize you to access student parent information as it relates to their involvement in Advanced Placement courses and National Honor Society membership. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that you will allow participants to volunteer and decline without penalty in order to minimize conflicts of interest and other potential ethical problems.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: provide contact information for parents whose students are part of the National Honor Society, but are not enrolled in Advanced Placement classes. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Elmer Avellaneda  
Elmer.avellaneda@lifeschools.net

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions

Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verifies any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

## Appendix L: PowerPoint Presentation

Slide #	Slide text	Slide notes
1	<p>A Parental learning Community (PLC) Focused on Increasing AP Class Enrollment</p> <p>Alissa Russell</p> <p>alissa.russell@waldenu.edu</p>	<p>Hello Everyone and welcome. I am very excited that you have joined me in creating this Parental Learning Community (PLC). My name is Alissa Russell and my contact information is on the screen. The educational benefits to your child will be phenomenal. They will outweigh any inconveniences you may experience. I completed a qualitative study to determine why academically able students (yours) are not taking advantage of the higher academic classes (AP courses). Research indicated that parental influence is a major force in student educational choices. The project study indicated that parents know little or nothing about AP course offerings at the school. The purpose of this PLC is to equip you with knowledge of AP courses and offer tools to support you with your child along this journey.</p>
2	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose</li> </ul>	<p>The purpose of this PLC is to provide parents</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How I conceived this project</li> <li>• What this training entails</li> </ul>	<p>with enough fortitude to encourage their child to enroll in and successfully complete AP courses. As I worked at the school, I became alarmed with the number of honor society students not enrolled in AP courses. I decided to conduct a qualitative study to ascertain the reason. I will provide additional resources for you to use if different situations occur and your child experiences discouragement in the higher level courses. You will also learn the benefits of AP classes in relation to your child's academic future and adulthood. I will share information about how this level of rigorous education could affect your family unit and neighborhood, but specifically your children. Lastly, you will become an ongoing network in which you receive continued support throughout the duration of the AP courses.</p>
3	Goals of This Training	Based on current data, parents are unaware that AP courses exist. You will review and analyze the benefits students receive when



		<p>they take AP courses. During this time, you will learn about the AP program and all of its intricacies with course requirements, offerings, and college credit received. You will understand the social connotations of rigor and its influence on adulthood. During this time, you will analyze rigor in different academic settings. Additionally, you will learn how to break rigorous exercises down into manageable parts and utilize these skills as they undergird their child's success in AP courses. You will comprehend the value of your continued involvement in your child's course selection and completion. You will become aware of the barriers which hinder your involvement and develop solutions for future practices.</p>
4	<p>Training Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful AP class completion</li> <li>• Increased self-efficacy</li> <li>• Student support</li> </ul>	<p>The learning outcome for this PLC is for you to obtain knowledge of AP classes and receive instructional support for your child to successfully complete the classes.</p>

		<p>This will be achieved by increasing your self-efficacy level. Murdock (2013) discovered that parental self-efficacy is closely correlated with the role of parenting. Parents influence their child. If you increase your self-efficacy regarding education, your child will also increase in educational self-efficacy. By focusing on building positive self-efficacy, you will feel empowered to get involved in their child's educational process (Murdock, 2013).</p> <p>I will also equip you to support your child as they embark on this more rigorous learning path. You will understand the benefits of AP classes and discover ways to meaningfully prosper in high rigor classrooms. Similarly, you will gain valuable parenting knowledge to engage high academic students.</p>
5	Why parents enroll their children at parent choice (Charter) school...	As of 2012, AP course enrollment only comprised about 27% of students worldwide (College Board, 2012).

		<p>However, more than 21 million students, or 65.9%, attended postsecondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Data from our students' eighth grade year reveals the students currently in AP classes are not the only academically successful students on campus. Even though parents and guardians choose to enroll students in this parent choice school, the students are still not taking advantage of advanced level academics.</p>
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6	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Understanding the Mission Statement</p>	<p>Turn to the Mission Statement page. Examine the mission statement and list reasons why parents enrolled their child in this parent choice school. All participants will divide into groups of three and given a copy of the school's mission statement. You will share how the mission statement (which you all read prior to enrollment) affected your decision to enroll your student at the school. You will number the three mission statements in order of importance and then brainstorm other reasons parents may have for student enrollment at the school. The groups will each prepare a presentation board with their list of choices and at least three sentences explaining their numbering. I will keep a record of each of the group's choices. The groups will then share their alternative ideas about why parents enroll their child at the school (if any).</p>
7	<p style="text-align: center;">What the Research Says:</p>	<p>Parents who choose to put their children in a school other than their normal neighborhood</p>

		<p>public school want advantages regular schools cannot offer (Grolnick et al., 2009). If the advantage is academics, then these students should be taking AP classes (Hemphill &amp; Vanneman, 2011). Parents are able to discern if their child is learning at school or not (Williams Shanks &amp; Destin, 2009). The parents who understand education is not just a need but also a necessity for a better life, take actions to ensure their children receive a quality education (Williams Shanks &amp; Destin, 2009). Ideally, it is reasonable these parents would take advantage of AP classes to obtain this goal. High poverty rates in the local setting would indicate a low post-graduation rate (Deming &amp; Dynarski, 2009). Studying this problem will help the low SES students acquire college readiness skills, and college credits to help them gain acceptance into college along with scholarship money awards.</p>
8	Do Parents Make a Difference?	Parents are a defining force in the student

		<p>course decision-making process. They affect students' achieving higher academic scores and choices to take higher level cognitive classes (Dweck, 2010; Grolnick et al., 2009; Hayes, 2011; Heckman, 2011; Rogers et al., 2009). This is true for both mothers and fathers. Supportive and nurturing parents promote higher self-efficacy within the student (Moorman &amp; Pomerantz, 2010; Singh, Singh, &amp; Singh, 2012). Students perceive they can achieve success in AP classes simply because their parents believe they can. Studies link a direct correlation between parental support at home and school achievement (Cheung &amp; Pomerantz, 2012; Rogers et al., 2009; Singh, Singh, &amp; Singh, 2012; Williams Shanks, &amp; Destin, 2009; Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, &amp; Pugh, 2011).</p>
9	<p>Activity: How Involved are You? 1 or 2   3   4 or 5</p> <hr style="width: 100%; margin: 0;"/>	<p>Turn to the T-chart page. You will complete a graphic organizer T-chart in which you list your involvement within your child's education during elementary school and your current</p>

		<p>involvement in your child's education. You will rank the importance of each of your actions on a scale of 1-5, with '1' being not very important and '5' being very important. You will then be given sticky notes to write down your entries (without names) and asked to place them on a big T-chart on the wall. Next, you will share your thoughts about the information on the T-chart with a partner and then the whole group.</p>
10	What the research says about Parental Involvement...	<p>Epstein (1986) defined parental educational involvement as a parents' "investment of various resources in their child's education" (p. 162). This involvement, then, includes academic and non-academic participation. She categorized parental involvement into five avenues: parenting, helping with homework, communications with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision making (Epstein, 1986). These include a parent showing up at a sports event, volunteering in the classroom, helping</p>

		<p>their student with homework or just making sure the student completes the homework, or simply making sure the students attends school on a regular basis. Dunkel-Schetter &amp; Bennett (1990) established these parental social relationships are vital to student success. Fehrmann et al. (1987) conducted an analysis involving over 28,000 high school students. They confirmed parental involvement is a major contributor to student success. Even while adding other factors, such as homework reminders and television time, a direct correlation established a relationship between parental involvement and student higher educational aspirations. Usher &amp; Kober (2012) specifically identified six tasks parents can do to motivate their students to attain higher aspirations: “praising effort, persistence, and mastery of subjects...talking to (students)...celebrating their learning...creative exploration (opportunities)...see academic</p>
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		achievement...setting realistic but high standards.” Parental support works, even if the parent knows nothing about the subjects the students are taking (Grolnick et al., 2009).
11	Parent Involvement and Student Motivation...	Redding (2006) reported parental involvement in student academics is very beneficial. Rogers et al. (2009) noted the biggest influence parental involvement has on student achievement aspirations is more indirect than direct. Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby (2008) noted parents must have all necessary information in order to make knowledgeable decisions, and many minority parents had no knowledge of AP courses offered at their children’s school. Cheung & Pomerantz (2012) observed “children’s learning was predictive of children’s parent-oriented motivation in school ... which predicted enhanced achievement among students” (p. 9).
12	Activity:  Brainstorming About Being More Involved  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_PQ2WUD2k">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_PQ2WUD2k</a>	Now you will watch a TED video and then determine your level of belief concerning whether or not your

		<p>involvement in your child's education is adequate (TED, 2012). You will then discuss reasons why you are or are not more involved in your child's educational choices with your table. Each table will share their thoughts and ideas. As a whole, we will suggest ways to overcome these challenges and develop verbatim practices for immediate implementation.</p>
13	Reflections and Thoughts...	<p>Now you will reflect on the information you learned today. Be sure to list which parts of the information you found most applicable to your current relationship you have with your child. Following this, construct a reasonable 'to-do' list of action items you pledge to personally implement immediately.</p>
14	Advanced Placement Courses Are ???	<p>The AP program developed as a way to "provide motivated high school students with the opportunity to take college-level courses" (Mo et. al, 2011, p. 354). The pilot program covered eleven subjects. As of 2012, there were 34 AP courses available in 22 different subjects (College Board, 2012).</p>

		<p>The College Board added Physics I and II in 2014. In 2008, over 3,500 colleges and universities nationwide awarded college credit for passing scores on AP exams (College Board, 2012). Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) discovered the majority of these higher learning institutions were using the exam scores as an indicator of merit to limit the admissions of minority students. In 2012, nearly 4 million students took over 2 million tests to receive the college credit (College Board, 2012). There are many advantages for students who enroll in AP courses. At the high school level, students in AP courses benefit from smaller classes and student-to-teacher ratios (College Board, 2012). AP classes also improve students' attributes and grade point averages for meeting college admissions criterion (College Board, 2012). These students also exhibit higher 'college readiness' abilities and are able to bypass remedial classes, thus saving tuition expenses (College Board, 2012).</p>
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		<p>This also allows students to have an educational mindset which improve their chances of graduating college successfully (College Board, 2012). As a result, AP students adapt more readily to the rigorous level of college classroom expectations (College Board, 2012). Both the high schools and colleges benefit from an increasing number of students who take AP courses (College Board, 2012). Students gain a higher level of cognitive thinking abilities when ability grouped (Grossman &amp; Stodolsky, 1995). Mo et al. (2011) found a direct correlation between students in AP classes and increased college entrance exam test scores.</p>
15	<p>Activity: Matching Game</p>	<p>Find the matching game sheet and get in groups of four. Cut out the squares (wait on all of the squares to get cut out). Sort the outcomes based on if they are a direct result of AP classes are not. Then share you grouping and reasoning with the group. Afterwards, we will have a whole group discussion about why</p>

		AP classes are or are not good for your child.
16	What do the College Board and AP have to do with each other?	<p>The College Board AP program regulates the subjects taught including the curriculum. For student exams, the College Board is responsible for the content and format (College Board, 2012). This, of course, means they are also responsible for scoring the exams. In addition, The College Board notified students and schools of their exam scores. However, colleges determine whether or not they will accept AP test scores for credit, including what level score they will accept (Moore &amp; Slate, 2010). An AP exam score of 5 is equivalent to an A in the related college course and indicates a student is <i>extremely well qualified</i>, a score of 4 is equivalent to a B and gives a <i>well qualified</i> indicator, and a score of 3 is equivalent to a C (College Board, 2012). Unfortunately, most colleges will not consider awarding college credit for a score of 2 or 1, and very few will award college credit for a 3 (College Board, 2012). However, most</p>

		<p>colleges do not use these scores to determine college admission, as the release of these scores are usually during the summer following the AP exam completion (Geiser &amp; Santelices, 2006). A regular review of college curriculum and semester exams, by the College Board, determines the rating of the scores. The College Board adjusts the scoring rubric to ensure it is closely in sync with what higher level institutions currently expect (College Board, 2012).</p>
17	Is AP a good fit for your child?	<p>Schultz (2012) said “Advanced Placement courses contribute to the highest level of academic intensity in a high school curriculum” (p. 119). In 2005, the National Center for Educational Accountability released a report on the relationship between AP classes and college graduation (Dougherty, Miller, &amp; Jian, 2006). They concluded AP students passing the exams associated with the classes were the best indicator of their future success in college; although, the percentage</p>

		<p>was only as high as the teacher’s effectiveness. There is a direct correlation between AP class students and high school students’ college readiness indices (Dougherty, Miller, &amp; Jian, 2006). Students who take AP courses have a tendency to carry a full college load, which enables them to graduate in a timely manner (Highsmith, 1989). In a previous study, Geiser and Santelices (2004) noted the number of AP courses on a student’s high school transcript did not have the same weight as the number of students who actually passed the exam and received college credit for courses. The National Center for Educational Achievement report recommended using AP classes as an effective method to prepare low income students for higher education success (National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010).</p>
18	<p>Activity:</p> <p>See the inside of actual AP classrooms</p> <p>“Inside AP Classes at Blue Spring High School”</p>	<p>Next we will observe actual students in AP classes while identifying and listing the attributes you discern within the students showcased. We</p>

	<a href="http://youtu.be/-iQ9SBMjZ9s">http://youtu.be/-iQ9SBMjZ9s</a>	<p>will share what you discerned with each other. Next, you will match your child's attributes with the ones on your list to establish a correlation between students already taking AP courses and your child.</p>
19	<p>Parental Involvement and AP Class Success...</p>	<p>The research pinpointed many possible causes of this phenomenon, in addition to the conclusion that parental influence seems to have the biggest effect on it. The research implied parents of high academic students not enrolled in AP classes possess no information about the availability and benefits of such classes (Cheung &amp; Pomerantz, 2012). Parental involvement is most important for student motivation when aspiring to higher academic achievement (Bryan, Glynn, &amp; Kittleson, 2011). A qualitative study examining why some parents of academically able students do not encourage their children to enroll in AP classes could potentially increase AP course participation, and have positive social implications for many.</p>



		<p>Among the many possible long term results, parents engage more in school activities and students receive better preparation for post-secondary schooling.</p>
20	Remembering our Purpose:	<p>The goal of this PLC is for the parents to learn about AP classes and then receive the skills and support to encourage your child to successfully participate in the AP classes. A specific learning outcome is to empower you to help your child with academic studies using informed processes. As the target audience is the parents of academically able students, this PLC will have to occur at times outside of normal school hours. One major theme throughout the</p>

		<p>qualitative study data was eight of the parents knew nothing about AP classes. Once they learned of AP classes and their benefits, these parents indicated they would have had their children enroll in these classes. This theme is important to note as it enforces the idea that parents use parent choice schools to fulfill their desires for their child's academic success. Subsequently, the parents confirmed that AP class enrollment would be higher if they possessed increased knowledge of these classes. Your next action item is to determine the most beneficial way to present AP class information to all parents.</p>
21	<p>Activity: Read about – “Love &amp; Logic”</p>	<p>Now we will read an article about parenting which deals with character and grade point averages (Loveandlogic, 2014). You will be divided into groups of five. Half of the groups of five will be for the information in the article and the other half will be against the information in the article. Two groups of five will hold debates’</p>

		trying to ‘convince’ the other side their side is correct. Afterwards, we will share our ‘big idea’ moments with the group.
22	Reflection and Homework...	You will craft a plan to engage your child in the love and logic dialogue tonight. Journal the experience and reflect on what you liked or did not like about the process. Be sure to note what things you felt should be different.
23	What is a PLC?	PLCs increase student academic levels (Hall, 2013; Kristmanson, Lafargue, & Culligan, 2011). These groups are the latest educational innovation that actually creates change in current practices (Richardson, 2011). A PLC is present when a group of professionals engages in ongoing inquiry, sharing, and acting to improve status (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). An individual becomes a professional in the field when he or she is “suitably educated and [part of a] skilled workforce” (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012, p. 406). At the age students are eligible for AP classes, parents have been parenting for at least 15 years. Hord (2009)

		<p>defined a professional as one who is “responsible” for a student’s education (p. 42). This qualifies parents for the classification of professionals in their field. Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) noted effective PLCs should occur at the school. They are “our best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement” (DuFour, 2007, p. 3).</p>
24	<p>Activity: PLC Articles</p>	<p>You will be put into six groups and numbered. Each group will be given a different article explaining PLCs. You will each read your article and highlight key information. You will then discuss you highlighted items with the group. Afterwards, each numbered person will get with the same numbered person from the other groups and share your information. I will make a list of the attributes and final concise agreed upon definition of Parental Learning Communities.</p>
25	<p>More About PLCs...</p>	<p>PLCs are able to awaken individuals’ responsibility toward a common, shared goal (Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield, &amp; Dupree,</p>

		<p>2012). Due to their exploratory nature, they are adaptable to every age group (Mokharti, Thoma, &amp; Edwards, 2009). Finland successfully used a collaborative group format to increase student academic achievement since 2004 (Rigelman &amp; Ruben, 2012). Johnson (2010) discussed the importance of people being able to reflectively discuss their situations to evaluate and fix problem areas. PLCs are able to connect professionals' knowledge with others (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2012). It is through this connection the most productive change occurs. There is a notion participants in any PLC will lose their individuality; however, PLCs have no distinct leader, which will help alleviate this possibility (Rigelman &amp; Ruben, 2012). In fact, the members will "continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire" (Hairon &amp; Dimmick, 2012, p. 406).</p>
26	Can We Be a PLC?	DuFour (2014) noted any type of professional development must be

		<p>“ongoing ... collective ... job-embedded ... [and] results-oriented” (p. 31). By engaging parents in a PLC, they will be better able to promote higher student academic achievement. PLCs can raise the educational goals, accomplishments, and comprehension levels of students (Edglossary.org, 2014). Dufour further claimed PLCs can “support the ongoing adult learning need for continual improvement” (DuFour, 2014, p. 31). PLCs are a good component to commonly link multiple parenting styles and approaches (Kristmanson et al., 2011). Parents of students in parent choice schools want to help their students achieve as much as they can. A PLC can give parents the tools they lack to implement this goal and influence changes within their children’s lives (Owens, 2010; Williams, 2013). In PLCs, the entire group becomes a resource which has a vast knowledge and experience base (Linder et al., 2012). The group has “a positive impact</p>
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		on ... student learning” (Kyoungnye & You-Kyung, 2012, p. 285). Through this base, removed barriers can help students reach higher academic potential.
27	Activity:  Breaking down PLCs	Now you will analyze the attributes of PLCs and identify your personal correlations with these attributes. You will use this information to create a ‘mock’ PLC in which your shared goal is to teach a young child to read. I am going to give you the books that the child needs to be able to read along with the current reading level of the child. Be sure to journal your thoughts and reactions within the five major components of a PLC (shared leadership, common vision and values, peer collaboration, collective learning and creativity, and tangible measurement of desired outcomes). I will act as the facilitator.
28	The Key to a Successfully Functioning PLC...	Key to the success of PLCs meeting their goals is to have regular meetings (Leane, 2014). They also need sufficient time to fulfill all components of the meeting (Owens, 2010).

		<p>Moreover, the meetings must allow for the same common courtesy afforded in other meetings (Williams, 2013). Predetermined agendas, based on the group's goals, are useful (Hord, 2009). PLCs create "a unifying force" amongst its participants (Clausen, Aquino, &amp; Wideman, 2009). Hord (2009) said they represent "the context most supportive of ... learning" (p. 40). They have some common components: shared leadership, common vision and values, peer collaboration, collective learning and creativity, and a tangible measurement of desired outcomes (Clausen, Aquino, &amp; Wideman, 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hairon &amp; Dimmock, 2012; Hord, 1997; Kyounghe &amp; You-Kyung, 2012; Owens, 2010; Richardson, 2011; Roy &amp; Hord, 2006). Gruenbaun (2010) stated these groups must "incorporate collaboration toward helping students with learning" while "assum(ing) individual responsibility to take action to build..." (para. 2). Each of these</p>
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		attributes work together to increase student academic success while minimizing unnecessary tasks (Hairon & Dimmick, 2012). In addition, the PLC's regular routine must include these attributes as they provide enhancement when implemented (Heirdsfield, Lamb, & Spry, 2010; Hord, 1997).
29	Establishing and Maintaining our Own PLC	The main ingredient for a successful PLC is a small group (between five and twelve) of professionals who share a common interest. The group members must also have a desire to reach a common goal based on their shared interest. Although there is no leader, per se, a group facilitator keeps the group focused to ensure the goals are met and analyzes outcomes for additional adjustments (Seo & Han, 2012). The facilitator will also make sure accurate minutes are kept and that all assignments are clear (Seo & Han, 2012). The only other resource necessary for the PLC is a place to meet.
30	Activity:	Now each of you will

	Your Commitment	<p>make a commitment to establish and maintain this PLC. We will get into a circle and pass a ball of yarn. Each person that receives the ball of yarn will state their intentions towards the PLC and a specific role they will take to establish the group. Some of the commitments may overlap, and that it is alright. I will record the commitments for all workshop participants and email you a copy.</p>
31	<p>Activity:</p> <p>Final Reflections</p>	<p>You will reflect on PLCs and journal the lessons you learned on this day and solidify your next committed step. This will include a step-by-step list of action items which need completing along with the next meeting date. We will then complete a ‘workshop speed sharing’ activity in which you will partner with another participant and share both a high and low point you experienced during this three day training. You will then rotate to another participant until four rotations are complete. Lastly, you will journal any final notes you want to remember.</p>

32	<p style="text-align: center;">Thank you!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PLC Training Assessment</p>	<p>Please complete an assessment of the PLC training to indicate the relevancy of the training. Your responses will further expand the usefulness of the training. It is on the last page of your packet. Once completed, please leave it on the table on your way out. Thank you so much. You have been a very enjoyable and captivating audience.</p>
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