College Preparation Coursework Opportunities for Students of Color at the Secondary

Level

by

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Abstract

This study applied Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) to understand the impact of environmental factors that influenced a student of color's access to college preparation coursework and programs. The purpose of this study was to explore how district and school administrators implemented purposeful efforts to increase the number of students of color enrolled in college preparation and coursework and programs at Mount Greenwood Public Schools (a pseudonym for a public-school district in Washington state). This study employed a qualitative analysis approach including interviews and document analysis to capture data that identified the influential factors that contribute to access for students of color. This study collected qualitative interview data from twelve district and building administrative staff members as well as district wide data on course completion, graduation rates, etc. using document analysis. This data was used to identify and validate assumed outcomes of access for students of color to college preparation coursework and programs. The findings of this study resulted in calibration between district office and school building, disaggregating all data by race, and accessibility to college preparation for all students. Based on these findings, research-based recommendations were identified to address the organization's challenges to equitable access to students of color to college preparation coursework. These recommendations included creation of authentic partnerships with students, families, and community members of color at the district and school level, creating accountable, multi-tiered systems of calibration and collaboration at the district and school level to support accessible outcome for students of color, and creating district and school policies and procedures to support accessible, culturally relevant college preparation coursework for students of color.

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Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Access to college preparation coursework and program opportunities for all students is crucial to post-secondary success as many employers require and seek highly qualified candidates who have both post-secondary degrees and skill sets (Paolini, 2019). To be prepared for post-secondary opportunities, students need access to college level knowledge and skills defined as "having the knowledge and support to successfully plan for and enroll in postsecondary institutions and pursue careers" (Uy et al., 2019, p. 415). Research indicates this can be achieved by offering students a combination of content knowledge, cognitive strategies, learning skills and dispositions, and specialized content knowledge (Bromberg & Theokas, 2016). To support students accessing knowledge that will prepare them for college, it is necessary to expose them to college preparation coursework and programs. However, in the 2016 report of the Education Trust, transcript outcomes of high school graduates showed that only 51% of Black students and 63% of Latinx students were provided with learning opportunities that reflected college preparation as compared to their White peers at 82% (The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). This study explores college preparation coursework and program opportunities accessible to students of color in public school settings, specifically in grades 9-12 as research indicates minority groups are deprived of opportunities of which they are capable, which poses "substantial barriers to achieving parity" for students of color as compared to their White peers (Klugman, 2013, p. 2).

Background of the Problem

Green and Forster (2003) define minimum college readiness as receiving a high school diploma (or equivalent), completing basic academic college prerequisites, and having the ability

to demonstrate basic literacy skills. According to Carey and Roza (2008), many 6th to 12th grade public schools in the United States do not have equitably planned and funded pathways to support college preparation for all students through coursework and programming opportunities. The specific organization used for research in this dissertation is Mount Greenwood Public Schools (MGPS), a pseudonym, which includes approximately 25,000 students and seven high school sites with approximately 70% of students identifying as an ethnicity other than white, 60% of students living in low socioeconomic status (SES) homes and 20% of students whose primary language is not English (Washington Department of Education, 2020). Despite recent surging graduation rates, from about 70% in 2012 to about 90% in 2019 (MGPS, 2019), MGPS currently graduates students of color who are accessing college preparation coursework at lower rates (approx. 40%) than White students (approx. 70%) (MGPS, 2020). Because these students are accessing less coursework to prepare themselves for post-secondary experiences, environments such as MGPS widen the achievement gap for students of color.

Students who are enrolled in college preparation courses are better positioned to achieve in post-secondary environments. Greene and Forster (2003) examined the gap in academic achievement between White, Asian, and upper-income students as compared to Black, Latinx, and low-income students concluding White and Asian students were enrolled in college preparation coursework at twice the rate of black peers and more than twice the rate of Latinx peers. Additionally, Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) identified the percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs was higher for Asian (72%) and White (40%) students compared to other racial and ethnic groups such as Black (23%), Latinx (34%), and Multi-Race (34%). According to research by Mount Greenwood

Public Schools (MGPS, 2017), the percentage of graduated White students who completed a post-secondary degree in 2017 was approximately 60%, which surpassed all subgroups except Asian students, who had about a 65% postsecondary completion rate. Latinx students completed a post-secondary degree at about a 45% rate and Black students at about a 40% rate (MGPS, 2017). Additionally, access disparities for students of color versus White students are often founded on disproportionate funding models providing lower allocations for education than their White peers (Carey and Roza, 2008). Such barriers to college preparation coursework and programs require a shift in practice and advocacy for the systems that promote equitable policies to promote equitable college preparation coursework and program access for all students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how school and district administrators are implementing focused efforts to increase the number of students of color enrolled in college preparation coursework and programs. It examines the conditions in public school systems to support the structures that prepare students of color for college preparation coursework and programs as well as the challenges administrators face and how they address these challenges.

1. How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?

2. What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how do they address them?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because the annual income difference between Americans who have obtained a college degree as compared to those with a high school degree or equivalent

went from $12,500 in 1965 to over $33,000 in 2007 (Haskins & Kemple, 2009). According to research by Carnevale et al. (2015), 6.6 million employment opportunities have been created since 2010 and 2.9 million of those jobs are considered "good jobs" with 97% filled by college graduates. There are a variety of societal and individual benefits to having a college degree (Chan, 2016). Individual benefits include improved health and life expectancy, greater rates of employment, increased personal status, and less likely to experience poverty, while societal benefits include reduced crime rates, increased community service, higher rates of blood donation and voting, and reduced rates of smoking.

Data shows that students of color in the United States are disproportionately placed in "lower-tracked" classes or, in under-funded schools, which equates to reduced access to college preparation coursework and programs, quality teachers and support staff, and smaller class sizes which places them at an immediate disadvantage than their White peers from an early stage (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Without the ability to access college preparatory coursework or programs, students of color face barriers to benefits commonly equated to post-secondary success.

<div align="center">**Definition of Terms**</div>

The following definitions will assist with better understanding the design, concepts, and the problem of practice in the following study.

Advanced Placement (AP)

AP is the placement of a student into a high school course at the college-level that offers college credit once successfully completed. This often includes a qualifying exam (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012).

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)

AVID is a framework which seeks to foster a "safe and open" learning environment, sets high expectations for both teachers and students, and focuses on collaboration within all classrooms (AVID, 2020). While AVID is a framework all students can use, it was originally designed to support students of color becoming first generation college students (AVID, 2020).

Cambridge Assessment International Education Program (CAIEP)

CAIEP, or "Cambridge" as it is referred to in MGPS, is a four-stage program designed to lead students through their "pre-university" years. The program cites subject experts and current educational research as the foundation for an academically rigorous program (Cambridge Assessment, 2020).

College Preparatory Courses

Courses of study which are designed to qualify and prepare students for college admission (Merriam-Webster, 2020). For the purposes of this study this includes AP, IB, and honors level coursework.

College and/or Career Readiness

According to the Nebraska Department of Education (2009), students who are both college and/or career ready can capitalize on their strengths, education, and experiences to bring value to their school or workplace and the community. This performance is founded on responsibility, performance, skills, ethics, and diligence. This prepares them for the next post-secondary step (either college or career readiness) in their life.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

IB is a framework that provides academic preparation for college by teaching students to think "critically and independently" (International Baccalaureate, 2020).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into the following five chapters. Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the problem of practice, as well as an overview of the study. Chapter Two reviews the existing literature as it relates to promising practices that aim to increase accessibility to college preparation programs and pathways for students of color. Chapter Three introduces the research methodology, as well as an analysis of collected data. Chapter Four provides and explores the results of the study, as well as shows what was found from the data collected. Chapter Five discusses the implications of the results, the limitations from the data collected, and what the study means for the future of college preparation and accessibility for students of color.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Inequities for Students of Color in Graduation and College Preparation

Inequities exist for people of color as it relates to graduation and college preparation. Sequentially, this section discusses these inequities. The review begins with an examination of historically disproportionate high school and college graduation rates of White students compared to students of color. Next, the review explores the disproportionate accessibility of college preparation coursework that students of color receive as compared to White peers. Finally, the review concludes by identifying specific college preparation coursework opportunities available to students and how the limited access to these opportunities that students receive suggests a trajectory that puts students of color at a disadvantage as compared to their White peers.

Disproportionate Graduation Rates

In the United States, students of color exhibit disproportionately low high school and college graduation rates as compared to their White peers (Cooper et al., 2018). In 2008, the NCES reviewed high school graduation rates over a 20-year span by student ethnicity. White students graduated high school at rates of 83% (1972), 78% (1982), and 74% (1992); Black students graduated at a rate of 9% (1972), 13% (1982), and 12% (1992); Latinx students graduated at a rate of 3% (1972), 8% (1982), and 10% (1992) (NCES, 2016). In 2010, 18% of Black students and 12% of Latinx students earned a baccalaureate degree as compared to their

White (30%) and Asian (50%) peers (Carnevale and Strohl, 2010). It is important to note that despite outperforming students of color by overall graduation rate, White students decreased in their graduation rate while both Black and Latinx students increased their graduation rates highlighting that students of color are just as academically capable as their White peers (NCES, 2016). In similar data collected in the 2010 U.S. Census, 88% of White students graduated from high school while 30% graduated from college. Comparatively, 63% of Latinx students graduated from high school and 14% from college, along with 77% and 13% for Native Americans (U.S. Census, 2010). One exception from this data was that Black students graduated at an overall 84% high school graduation rate (most aligned to White peers), but that their college graduation rate was merely 20% (Cooper et al., 2018). With students of color consistently graduating at disproportionate rates of their White peers, it is important to identify strategies to support proportionate rates of coursework support and opportunities for these students.

Disproportionate Access to College Preparation

The path to completing a baccalaureate degree begins prior to college in secondary high school settings where, across the United States, there is a lack of college preparation and coursework opportunities for students, specifically students of color. Black and Latinx students in the United States have less access to academically rigorous college preparation coursework as compared to their White peers (Ahram et al., 2011; College Board, 2014; Education Trust, 2014; Ford, 2013). Banks (2008) suggests that learning environments, along with curriculum, within classrooms for students of color fail to positively reflect contributions made by people with similar backgrounds. To be prepared and ready for college level work, it is important that

students of color graduate high school proportionately to their White peers and have direct access to academically rigorous, college preparation coursework at the secondary level that is representative of their population (Banks, 2008). Access to equitable college preparation courses is important for the post-secondary plans off all students and school transcripts serve to understand the type of courses that students of color are accessing.

Inequities to college preparation coursework accessibility exist in the transcripts of students of color as compared to their White peers. In examining root causes through data, the Education Trust in 2016 (NCES, 2016), reported that only 51% of Black and 63% of Latinx high school transcripts reflected college readiness as compared to their White peers at 82%. In similar research conducted by Greene and Forster (2003), White and Asian students enrolled in college preparation coursework at twice the rate of Black and Latinx peers. In 2016, the percentage of students enrolled in AP and IB coursework was higher for Asian and White students than Black, Latinx, and Multi-Race (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Transcripts serve as a way for schools to identify gaps in accessibility to college preparation for students of color and further identify the content specific college preparation courses that students of color may not be accessing.

Content specific college preparation courses play an important role in college access, often serving as "gatekeeping" courses (Flennaugh et al., 2017). According to The Education Trust West (2013), only 1 in 20 Black kindergarteners in the state of California will graduate from high school and complete their college degree from a 4-year university. Flennaugh et al. (2017) highlights the lack of rigorous, culturally competent coursework that would more aptly prepare all students for high school and beyond. Their research points out that, in California, only 21% of Black students are proficient in Algebra, which is typically a course that serves as a

gateway to accessing college level math classes (Flennaugh et al., 2017). In research conducted

by Gamoran and Hannigan (2000), 77% of White students accessed Algebra level courses in

high school, while 9 % of Black and 10% of Latinx students accessed such courses. In similar

research, Kelly (2009), concluded that Black students enrolled in lower level math classes

(Algebra I or less) was at a 56% rate, with enrollment in higher level math classes

(Geometry/Algebra II level or higher) at a 44% rate. White students enrolled in lower level math

classes (Algebra I or less) at a 35% rate, with enrollment in higher level math classes

(Geometry/Algebra II level or higher) at a 65% rate. In addition to the preparatory courses,

access to AP and IB programs are equally critical.

AP classes not only prepare students for college but also provide students with credits

they can use toward their college transcript. Classes such as AP and/or IB are specifically

designed to support students who "seek to gain admission into selective colleges and/or earn

credits toward the college degree" (Iatarola et al., 2011). In demographic data collected from the

state of Texas in 2000, student enrollment in AP classes was greatly disproportionate by race

(Klopfenstein, 2004a). White students enrolled in AP classes in Texas were overrepresented by a

rate of 1.30% with Asian students overrepresented by a rate of 2.10%. Meanwhile, students of

color were underrepresented by 59% (Black) and 61% (Latinx) in AP classes. Despite

disproportionate representation in college preparatory classes, the percentage of students who

pass AP exams tend to show little disproportionality.

Capability of Students of Color in College Preparation Courses

Students of color pass AP exams at a proportional rate to other students (Dougherty et al.,

2005, Sadler, 2007). AP exam results in the state of Texas indicated 65% of White students

passed their AP exams, 54% of Latinx, and 53% of Black. In the state of Indiana, research conducted using a diverse student sample indicated that students who were enrolled in AP classes, regardless of race, were found to attain higher college GPAs (Sadler, 2007). When given the ability to access college preparation classes, students of color do not significantly underperform as related to their White peers (Dougherty et al., 2005). Disparities in AP classes like the example highlighted below have prompted legal action. In 1999, a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union against the State of California (Daniel v. California, 1999) challenged the disparity of student participation in AP and honors courses (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). The American Sociological Review (2009) research suggested social class has a "direct and persisting impact" on both access and enrollment to postsecondary success (Alon, 2009). Despite graduating and participating in college coursework at lower rates than White peers, students of color perform at the same level when provided the support, opportunity, and access. Therefore, accessing such coursework better positions students to receive the benefits that this participation provides.

Benefits of College Preparation and Coursework for Students of Color

College preparation and coursework benefits students in their post-secondary plans. Sequentially, this section explores the definition of college and career readiness and identifies college preparation and/or coursework as essential to being prepared for college. Next, the review establishes various reasons as to why students who access college preparation coursework are better positioned to both enroll and complete college. Finally, the review explores financial benefits that being prepared for and completing college affords individuals. The review, in its

totality, does not represent a comprehensive list of all benefits that exist for students of color as it relates to accessing college preparation and coursework.

Importance of College Preparedness

There are many benefits to accessing college preparation and coursework. For students to be prepared for and complete college, they require access to college preparatory coursework to support this postsecondary success (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). College (and career) preparedness is defined by Mueller and Gozali-Lee (2013) in three areas: academic preparedness, expected attitudes/behaviors or "soft skills," and college/career knowledge. Academic preparedness means that a student will have the knowledge and skills necessary to do college-level coursework without remediation. Expected attitudes/behaviors is having the mindset (beliefs, attitudes, and values) and behaviors needed to succeed at a postsecondary institution including perseverance, self-efficacy, and organizational habits (Mueller & Gozali-Lee, 2013). College/career knowledge includes having the information and knowledge (e.g., entrance exams, applications, financial aid, etc.) needed from start to finish to plan, enroll, and complete college (Uy et al., 2019). By accessing skills to prepare them for college, all students are better equipped to access college material once they are enrolled in college.

Access in College Preparation Increases Access in College

Students who access college preparation coursework and/or classes are better positioned to enroll in and attend college (Iatarola et al., 2011). Enrollment and participation in these classes both enhance academic skills and knowledge needed to navigate and prepare students for college (Haskins & Temple, 2009). Haskins and Temple (2009) determined that college preparation coursework positions students to master new academic learning goals and increase their grade

point averages (GPA), develop behavioral skills such as organization and study habits, helps them to meet the minimum requirements needed to enter college, and supports students in passing college entrance exams (SAT and ACT). According to Adelman (1999), the impact of an academically rigorous college preparation curriculum had a greater impact on Black and Latinx students than for White students. Black and Latinx students who progressed to math classes beyond Algebra II had improved degree completion rates by 27.5% (Black) and 18.5% (Latinx). White students who progressed to math classes beyond Algebra II had improved degree completion rates at a lower rate of 10.4%. Students who have accessed college preparation material, which then better prepares them for college-level coursework, are further supported to successfully complete their college degree.

Students who are prepared for college, through college preparation coursework and/or programs, are better positioned to complete college (Sadler, 2007) and benefit personally from this accomplishment. According to Chan (2016), individual benefits to completing a college degree include improved health and life expectancy, greater rates of employment, improved working conditions, higher likelihood of attending graduate school, and more likely to raise children with higher IQ levels. Additionally, there are a variety of financial benefits to completing a post-secondary degree.

Financial Benefits for College Graduates

According to research by Haskins and Kemple (2009), students who complete college make, on average, $33,000 more per year in entry level jobs (and overall 66% higher salaries) as compared to students who have earned only a high school diploma. In addition to higher salaries, further positive financial impacts include better work benefits and decreased likelihood of

experiencing poverty (Appendix B) (Chan, 2016). In research conducted by Carnevale et al. (2015), out of the 6.6 million jobs that were created since the Great Depression, 2.9 million of these are considered "good" jobs. Out of those jobs, 2.8 million (97%) have been filled by workers with at least a bachelor's degree. "Good" jobs are defined by the researchers as "the upper-third by median wages of occupations in which they are classified" (Carnevale et al., 2015). Finally, students who enroll in and succeed at obtaining a college degree are better positioned to complete a terminal degree (Sanderson et al., 1999). While benefits exist for students of color who have access to college preparation, there are challenges and barriers when students of color do not have access to this coursework.

Challenges and Barriers to Inequitable Access and Enrollment for Students of Color

When given limited access to college preparation coursework, students of color are faced with challenges and barriers that could limit their post-secondary success. Sequentially, this section discusses those challenges and barriers. The review begins with data that highlights the correlation between schools with higher percentages of minority students and fewer AP courses being offered. Next, the review identifies disproportionate funding models that exist within public school districts at the student level, depending on status. Finally, the review explores additional challenges and barriers that immigrant and refugee students and families face due to a lack of familial knowledge about enrolling in and attending college. The review, in its totality, does not represent a comprehensive list of all challenges and barriers that exist for students of color as it relates to accessing college preparation and coursework.

Less College Preparation Access for Students of Color

Students of color face significant challenges and barriers with accessing and enrolling in college preparatory courses. In research conducted by Klugman (2013), high schools serving White and Asian students had higher percentages of AP course offerings and enrollments as compared to high schools serving predominantly Black and Latinx students. Schools serving minority students were less likely to offer AP courses altogether as compared to schools with a predominantly White population (Conger et al., 2009). This promotes inequitable access because AP courses are "marks of distinction valued by selective colleges" (Geiser & Santelices, 2006; National Research Council, 2002). Access disparities are not limited to AP classes. Data documented from previous studies show that enrollment in other college preparation courses (e.g., honors math, college preparatory tracks) were predominantly filled by White, Asian, and female student groups compared to other groups (College Board, 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Planty et al., 2007; Reigle-Crumb, 2006; Zeitz & Prathibha, 2005). Access to college preparation is provided inequitably to schools with majority white students vs. schools with majority students of color. This is not surprising considering funding models that determine these schools' funding distribute less funds overall to schools with majority students of color vs. their majority white peer schools.

Disproportionate Funding Models

Access and enrollment of college preparatory coursework is significantly affected by disproportionate funding models utilized both nationally and at the state level (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). In a study of the 2008-2009 fiscal expenditures of public schools in 25 states, districts in the 95th percentile received, on average, $21,844 per students while districts in the

5th percentile received $8,205 per student, for a difference of over $13,000 per student

depending on demographic (NCES, 2016). Disparities also exist between similar schools.

Research conducted by Carey and Roza (2008) examined the funding of two schools (Cameron

School in Virginia and Ponderosa School in North Carolina) of similar student enrollment size,

and percentage of low-income students attending, less than 350 miles from one another.

According to Carey and Roza (2008), due to different funding algorithms set by the state level,

there was a $7,267 disparity between Ponderosa ($6,773) and Cameron ($14,040) per student

when combining the total allotment per student based on funding from federal, state and local

funding sources. Schools with more resources can provide more resources to students and those

with less can (and then, ultimately, will) provide less (Carey & Roza, 2008). Due to disparate

funding models, schools with large percentages of students of color are typically provided with

less funds to finance programmatic pieces such as college preparatory coursework. Funding

models that support disproportionate accessibility of resources have significant implications for

communities of color.

Public schools in the United States work through a system in which the quality of a

school is shaped by the amount of wealth in its school district (Kozol, 1991; Slavin, 1999;

Condron & Roscigno, 2003). Funding disparities significantly affect students of color and school

communities with high percentages of students of color. At the federal level, schools that have an

enrollment of 90% or more students of color spend at least $733 less per student per year than

schools that have an enrollment above 90% White students due to federal funding structures

(Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012). For other schools that do not fall over or above the 90% levels, at

least a full $344 more is spent on every White student than on students of color. Access to

college preparation is not equitably funded for all students, with students of color accessing the least. For students and student of color from immigrant families, there are further challenges that limit college preparation access.

Additional Challenges for Immigrant Families

Finally, immigrant students of color face additional, unique barriers to accessing and enrolling in college. Cooper et al. (2018) considered the "academic pipeline problem" that limits the pathway that immigrant, low socioeconomic, and racial minority students face in accessing higher education. As of 2015, 1 out of every 4 Americans was an immigrant or had an immigrant parent and this number will continue to rise (Wambu et al., 2017). For immigrant families, adjusting to their new culture and learning a new language are challenges that are often difficult and confusing to navigate. Some of these immigrants are undocumented, with this number representing 65,000 students in classrooms across the country (Kantamneni et al., 2016). According to Kantamneni et al. (2016), undocumented students face many barriers due to their unique status when attempting to access resources needed to prepare for an enroll in college. Only 5-10% of this population attend college, due to being unable to afford tuition, and inability to provide proof of legal residency, and gaps in knowledge about how to prepare and enroll in college (Kantamneni et al., 2016). In a study by Alon (2009), research indicated that social class had a "direct and persisting impact on enrollment and access...to postsecondary success." Other barriers that may affect both immigrant and nonimmigrant students of color include a lack of familial knowledge about attending college and navigating the application and enrollment process (Alon, 2009; Uy et al., 2019; Wright & Boun, 2011). In summary, Farmer-Hinton (2008) points out that, due to policies and practices that are racialized, families of color have been

disproportionately affected as it relates to educational access and attainment. Because of this, students of color and their families have been left without personal networks that can share with them the detailed and specific expertise and resources they need to enroll and access college (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). It is important to identify viable and authentic strategies and interventions to support this lack of accessibility.

Strategies and Interventions to Address Equitable Enrollment in College Preparation Coursework and Programs

There are a variety of strategies and interventions to address the equitable access in college preparation coursework and programs. Sequentially, this section discusses those strategies and interventions. The review begins with school districts to focus on the expansion of college preparation course offerings (e.g., AP IB, etc.) through an identification of funds to support post-secondary success. Next, the review focuses on the importance of engaging the community to create personal networks for students of colors that counteract deficit-oriented perspectives. Finally, the review explores engaging communities of color to identify strategies and interventions that will be relevant and helpful in this area. The review, in its totality, does not represent a comprehensive list of all strategies and interventions that exist for students of color as it relates to accessing college preparation and coursework.

Expanding College Preparation Access for Students of Color

School communities across the United States are considering and creating actionable strategies and interventions to address inequitable access and enrollment in college preparation coursework and programs (Levine & Zimmerman, 2010). The strategies and interventions discussed will outline how this can be done through addressing school funding disparities,

creating school models with college preparatory coursework and resources, considering career academy environments that promote both college and career skill building knowledge, focused support from high school counselors, and developing of a culturally relevant and responsive environment that is informed by student voice. Through consideration of these strategies, schools will be better positioned to provide access to college preparation coursework to all students. One model focused on building equity and sustainability for students of color is Equal Opportunity Schools.

Equal Opportunity Schools (EOS) is a program for school districts which is founded on the Action for Equity (A4E) multi-phase model which is designed to support students of color and low-income students towards successful experiences in their first AP and/or IB course (Equal Opportunity Schools, 2021). Of the schools which have chosen to work with EOS through the A4E model, about 80% of schools continue their partnership with the organization. According to EOS (2021), this exposes schools to additional strategies and best practice models which are designed to remove barriers and create welcoming environments specifically for first-time and/or low-income students of color. This includes, but is not limited to, the equitable expansion of AP classes within diverse schools (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012).

AP classes are common college preparation coursework opportunities for high school students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012). In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education encouraged school districts to utilize stimulus money to fund the expansion of AP course offerings to students and to also support with the remedial coursework that may be needed to prepare students for the rigor of these classes (Klugman, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). While school reform for funding models at the federal, state, and local level would be

helpful and would alleviate many funding inequities between schools and school districts, it is important for school districts to identify academic priorities and consider how this aligns to the funding being provided (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012). By identifying available funds to support the post-secondary success of students, school districts will be better positioned to provide accessibility to students and form school models that provide a community of support.

Personal Networks for Communities of Color

Students of color often lack the personal networks and resources to properly prepare and enroll in college (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). As such, schools must develop networking and community models to support students with this knowledge and these models must immerse students in an environment focused on both academics and social-emotional supports (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Research conducted by Means (2019) identifies three implications for highly supporting students. The first is capitalizing on support from many areas including family, teachers and school staff, and community/youth-based organizations to encourage students to prepare, plan, and attain information needed to fulfill college and career aspirations (Means, 2019). Next, Means (2019) stresses that all educators (administration, teaching staff, support staff) must consider how their learning community will disrupt practices and policies that are grounded in "deficit-oriented perspectives" of students of color and their families. Finally, educators, community members, and policymakers must redesign college preparatory curriculum to be more rigorous and comprehensive for students of color at a younger age (Means, 2019). Additionally, as the need for college preparatory classes increases, districts should also rethink how they are encouraging low-income students and students of color to enroll in and complete these courses (Haskins & Kemple, 2009). By creating models to immerse students in academic

and social-emotional support and consider the redesign of culturally relevant curricula, communities can facilitate the creation of learning environments that support students of color and their families.

Engaging and Including Communities of Color to Support Students of Color

It is important to include communities of color when determining how to best support communities of color (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 includes an expectation of school district and state agencies to prepare students for both college and career (Hackmann et al., 2018). In an education environment where there is a continued need to prepare students for both college and career, some school districts are exploring career academy models to support the attainment of both skill sets (Brand, 2009). Brand (2009), career academies are defined as smaller learning environments that typically adhere to the following guidelines: (a) students take career-focused courses for a minimum of two years which are taught by a teaching team of varying disciplines, (b) students learn from a college preparatory curriculum which is aligned to a career focus so students can apply real-world applications, and (c) students have the ability to interact and learn from other entities in the community such as local employers, and higher education agencies. Under these conditions, career academies can enhance student learning outcomes and increase employment success for all students, including students of color (Kemple, 2008). While systems, such as career academies, are important to providing systemic elements to promote college preparation access, it is equally important that the people supporting these systems, such as counselors, have the knowledge to support students through these systems.

School counselors need to be prepared to support the development of the following domains of every student: academic, college/career, and personal/emotional (Perusse et al., 2015). Through facilitation of college and career activities that prepare students of color for post-secondary success, counselors can support students with disseminating information needed to foster a college-going culture (Mayes & Hines, 2014). Mayes and Hines (2014) identified eight activities and tools that school counselors can use to prepare students of color and their families for college: (a) college aspirations, (b) academic planning for college and career readiness, (c) enrichments and extracurricular engagement, (d) college and career exploration and selection process, (e) college and career assessments, (f) college affordability planning, (g) college and career admission processes, and (h) transition from high school graduation and college enrollment.

To create a learning environment that promotes culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices, it is important to listen, learn, and act based on the population you are serving (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019). Therefore, Jackson and Knight-Manuel (2019) identify eight components which educators who teach students of color must include in their practice. These components support teachers to develop culturally relevant practices which promote increased student success in college and career readiness classes. Included in these eight components are cognitive strategies evaluating sociocultural inequities, transition knowledge linked to strategies for overcoming students' barriers to access and success, and content knowledge connected to sociopolitical contexts impacting students of color. Other ways to develop a culturally relevant and responsive teaching environment include working alongside students to co-create practices to support students of color. Research shows that by including students in creating changes and

practices to the school environment, schools have seen improved results in social emotional development (e.g., leadership skills, problem solving skills, life skills, relationship-building) (Bradshaw et al., 2014). To support the problem of inequitable college preparation for students of color, it is important to consider these strategies to promote ways to intervene and support students and families of color.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study builds from the theoretical framework developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the research and accompanying literature within this chapter. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), this theory relies on the biology of the student as the primary environment that powers their development. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) highlights the quality and context of the student's environment as highly impactful to the student's development and, as the student develops, their interactions with this environment results in a complex identity. Due to the student's growth and change in this environment, complex circumstances may appear due to the everchanging physical and cognitive structures within the student's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The conceptual framework allows for the exploration and understanding of the factors influencing the relationship between the family, school, and community. Within the ecological systems framework, there are many layers that influence and affect an individual and, in this study, these layers interact to create the culture of accessibility to college preparation at school as they pertain to this study. This study will primarily focus on the relationships and contexts within the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem of a student's environment.

Microsystem and Mesosystem

Within the microsystem of the student's environment, the relationships closest to the student in their everyday life are critical to their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the people in this environment are a student's family members, school staff, and community members, including friends and people in personal networks (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). The relationships between these people all operate within the mesosystem. Elements of the student's life which lie within the mesosystem include the personal networks accessible to the student (Farmer-Hinton, 2008) and the level of engagement within communities of color that exist (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019) between the family, school staff, and other close members of the student's community. Additionally, the intentional expansion of college preparation coursework (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012) at the school/district level, paired with the belief in the capability of students of color to take and successfully complete college preparation coursework (Sadler, 2007; Dougherty et. al, 2005) within this system aligns with Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979). The people within the microsystem and the relationships with and between these people within the mesosystem are important to understand in the examination of the situational challenges which operate within the exosystem of the student's environment.

Exosystem and Macrosystem

The exosystem examines the situational challenges and elements within a student's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the exosystem layer will highlight factors at play that affect a student's accessibility to equitable college preparation coursework and programs. The elements which operate in the exosystem of this study include the benefits of college preparation access for students of color including increased finances (Haskins & Kemple,

2009) and the evidence that access to college preparation increases accessibility to college enrollment (Iatarola et al., 2011). Also operating in the exosystem are challenges which include disproportionate funding models for college preparation coursework by race (Biddle & Berliner, 2002) to support the current disproportionate accessibility for students of color (Klugman, 2013).

In addition to understanding the situational challenges a student faces in the exosystem, it is equally important to consider these challenges by examining the student's identity through the macrosystem. In the macrosystem, cultural identities of the students, such as access to teaching staff representing the student's background and the outcomes for students based on this background, highlight elements that coincide with the macrosystem as aligned to Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979). For the purposes of this study, these elements further highlight components which also lie within the exosystem and macrosystem, including less access to quality of programs, curriculum, and course pathway opportunities (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012), often significantly affected by school funding models in alignment with Affirmative Action practices (Klugman, 2013). Additional components within this model include systemic barriers that immigrant families and families of color historically face, such as low wage jobs and inequitable accessibility to diverse teaching staff and programs, and funding models that prevent immigrants and families of color from socioeconomic mobility, further highlighting the historical shifts that affirmative action practices promote (Cooper et. al, 2018; Klugman, 2013; Kantemneni et. al, 2016). By considering the layers outlined above, this study will focus on the elements coinciding within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem layers as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem examines the transitions and historical racial shifts that have occurred (and continue to occur) for populations of color as it relates to education. According to the *New York Times*, in 2018 the Trump administration reversed policies set by the Obama administration to call on universities to include race as a consideration for admittance in order to diversify their student populations on campus. The Trump administration defended the dissolution of these seven Obama administration-created guidelines which supported affirmative action and stated they were "beyond the requirements of the Constitution." (New York Times, 2018). Factors, such as the ones stated above, create changing climates that students and families of color and schools need to navigate to best prepare students of color for success after high school.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
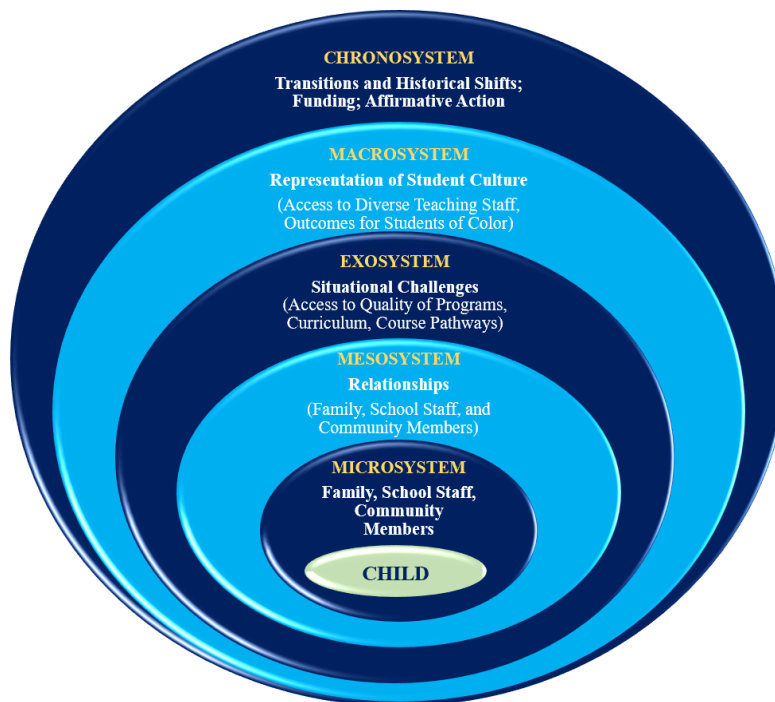
Summary

Communities of color have received inequitable access to college preparation courses which inevitably affect preparedness for post-secondary success (Ahram et al., 2011; College Board, 2014; Education Trust, 2014; Ford, 2013). This is important because there are a variety of professional and personal benefits that can result from access to college preparation coursework and programming (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Haskins & Kemple, 2009; Sanderson et al., 1999). Without access to these opportunities, the achievement gap widens, and students of color are further limited access to these benefits and are faced with challenges to adequate college preparation (Cooper et al., 2018; Kantemneni et al., 2016; Klugman, 2013). Through identifying and employing strategies to directly support the college and post-secondary preparation of students of color in secondary settings, school districts will be better positioned to identify root causes and create equitable accessibility for all students (Brand 2009; Farmer-Hinton, 2008;

Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019; Klugman, 2013; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012).

By examining this study through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), the many layers that influence a student's educational world and access to college preparation will be examined as it relates to college preparation. Chapter Three presents the study's methodological approach and includes a description of the validation process of the assumed contextual layers that influence this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study focused on the accessibility of college preparation and coursework for students of color at the secondary level. This chapter outlines the research questions and overview of design, research setting, researcher background, data sources, validity, reliability, ethics considerations, and limitations/delimitations of the study.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?

2. What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how do they address them?

Overview of Design

The design of the research study was a series of interviews using a qualitative approach to support and contradict the topic of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). School and district leaders of varying racial backgrounds and job titles participated in interviews which were transcribed and organized to identify challenges and interventions. This approach supported the identification of practices and strategies to promote accessibility to college preparation coursework for all secondary students.

The specific problem of practice of this study is secondary students of color's equitable accessibility to college preparation coursework and pathways. The study was conducted within a single school district and analyzed from a secondary (9th - 12th grade) context. In addition, district and school leaders were asked about their backgrounds and personal experiences with this problem and were asked for ideas they have that may help support the accessibility and enrollment of students of color in college preparation coursework.

Figure 2

Data Sources

Research Questions	Interview Method	Document Analysis
1: How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?	X	X
2: What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how do they address them?	X	

Research Setting

This study was conducted in Mount Greenwood Public Schools (MGPS), a pseudonym, a medium-sized school district in Washington State which employs approximately 3,000 staff members to serve approximately 25,000 students. The student population represents over 120 different languages spoken and over 67% of students identify as non-white (MGPS, 2017).

The target population for this interview was school and district leaders of MGPS. This was an appropriate group because these staff members were able to directly lead and support school or district efforts to promote equitable enrollment in college preparatory courses for students of color. Participants were recruited based on their positionality and racial background, with an effort to collect data from varying ages, positions, and racial backgrounds. Additionally, recruitment efforts were focused on schools with racially diverse student populations.

The Researcher

The researcher of this study was a building-level administrator employed by MGPS. Identified issues included positionality and ethics. As a current administrator at MGPS, the researcher would be asking peers (principals and directors) as well as supervisory level staff (executive and chief-level employees) to participate in the interview process. This was mitigated because the researcher did not often work directly with many of the targeted participants. However, because they were peers in the same district, the researcher did have the advantage of having previously known participants, which was important for a culturally responsive evaluation (Robinson & Leonard, 2019). Additionally, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), all the participants who were interviewed were at the same supervisory level or higher than the participant, which eliminated concerns of power and positionality.

Data Sources

Interviews

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an interview collecting qualitative data generally follows a less formalized process, which allows flexibility and the opportunity for a more natural flow. This framework also allows the opportunity of including follow-up questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Administrators were interviewed from six secondary schools and multiple departments within the MGPS school district. Virtual (due to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines) individual interviews were anonymously conducted over a two-week timespan by the researcher and transcribed to study and organize the collected data.

Patton (2002) shares six types of interview questions: experience and behavior questions; opinions and values questions; feeling questions; knowledge questions; sensory questions; and

background/demographic questions. For this study, the researcher sought to understand the process and planning methods that secondary school and district administrators employed (or did not employ) to support college preparation for students of color. The researcher also sought to organize data based on the participant's personal experiences and exposure to college preparation. To collect this information, the types of questions that were used were demographic questions, opinions and values questions, and sensory questions. Research by Patton (2002) explains that demographic questions establish the participants' age, education, and occupation and identify characteristics of a participant. Additionally, opinion and values questions support understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of individuals as it relates to their opinions, judgments, and values. Finally, sensory questions help identify what is "seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled" and allow the interviewer to enter the sensory experiences of the respondent (Patton, 2002). These three question types supported the thought process, motivational influences, and environmental influences that shape the establishment of process and planning methods as it relates to access to college preparation for students of color. All three types of questions provided a foundation of information in response to the research questions of the study.

Participants. Participants of this study included district/school level leadership and staff members who influenced how students were enrolled in courses. This sampling included twelve administrator-level staff members of varying job positionalities in the district and their demographic background, with equal representation of White administrators to administrators of color. These participants made up purposeful sampling that will be recruited based on their relationship with the researcher and the current district focus on this topic.

Instrumentation. The interview process for this study was conducted by utilizing the Bronfenbrenner theory and collected qualitative data from individuals to study the level of impact of group efficacy as it pertained to supporting the enrollment of students of color in college preparatory coursework (Bandura, 2006). The eighteen interview questions (see APPENDIX A) collected anecdotal data and sought to identify patterns of practice of district leaders as it pertained to the support of equitable systems to support college preparation access for students of color. The content of the interview process collected knowledge of identification of district utilized strategies, resources, and processes which supported enrolling students of color in college preparatory courses at equitable rates based on enrollment.

Data collection procedures. The data collection method used in this qualitative study was conducted interviews. This interview process was conducted in online interviews with identified participants as the interviewees and the researcher as the interviewer. Interviewees were recruited based on their direct support and knowledge of the studied work in hopes to cultivate responses that were grounded in validity. The researcher recruited participants (both building and district administration) by leveraging both the positive relationship of the researcher with the team as well as the district focus on this topic. The researcher sent a personal email to each administrator using her personal email with a message that had been previously approved by MGPS district administration. When needed, the researcher recruited staff through convenient sampling methods.

Each confidential interview was conducted remotely, via an online conferencing application, to adhere to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. Interviews were approximately one hour in length and answers to questions were transcribed from audio recording. This method

allowed for the interviewee to share detailed descriptions of their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2015) as it pertains to the problem of practice in a way that may not have been as thoroughly collected through a quantitative approach.

Data analysis. Data analysis is a multidimensional process and one that provides meaning to the data that was collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the conducted interviews, data analysis began during data collection. The researcher documented their thoughts, concerns, and initial conclusions about the data in relation to the conceptual framework and research questions. Once the researcher left the field, interviews were transcribed and coded. In the first phase of analysis, the researcher used open coding, looking for empirical codes and applied a priori codes from the conceptual framework. A second phase of analysis was conducted where empirical and a priori codes were aggregated into analytic/axial codes. In the third phase of data analysis, the researcher identified pattern codes and themes that emerged in relation to the conceptual framework and study questions.

Document Analysis

The researcher identified, through the process of interviews, key documents to review and collect data regarding student access and completion of college preparation coursework by using the content analysis method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is one of the most often used processes to collect documents and an "unobtrusive" technique that allows researchers to analyze data that may be unstructured in the content it may contain or the role it plays in the lives of the students it will track. After being provided with permission and access to the necessary data platforms, the researcher, over a

week's time, collected, organized, and reviewed anonymous relevant documents such as student transcripts and schedule planning documents provided to the researcher without any identifiers.

Participants. Participants of this portion of the study consisted of twelve building and district administrators with eight serving as building-level administrators and four as district-level administrators. Additionally, six of the administrators identified as people of color and six identified as White. Finally, nine of the administrators were female and three were male. For the data collection of this study, interviews were conducted for qualitative analysis. An email request to participate in the interview process was sent to twenty administrators by the researcher with the expectation that, perhaps, not all would be interested in participating. Of these twenty, a diverse group of twelve administrators responded to the email stating they would like to participate, so further recruiting was not conducted. For each interview, there were eighteen questions asked as well as additional follow-up questions when deemed appropriate by the interviewer. All interview respondents were administrators at MGPS school district and all interviews were conducted within three weeks of one another. The interviews were conducted via a live virtual setting and responses were reported without personal identifiers. Responses to the questions, as well as the virtual session, were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The results have been placed in a secure location and have not been shared with any external parties. The responses were analyzed for the qualitative findings of the study.

Data Collection Procedures. The data collection method that was used in this qualitative study was content analysis associated with the coursework taken and completed by students of color, such as student transcript and course enrollment data without student identifiers. Relevant documents were collected from interviewed participants and from school online websites pages.

This information was collected by organizing the guiding questions through qualitative coding methods to identify patterns of practice to see utilized strategies.

Data Analysis. For this study, the researcher used the content analysis method (Merriam & Tisdell), to analyze documents aligned to understanding the access that students of color had to college preparation coursework. The researcher analyzed documents and artifacts for evidence consistent with the concepts in the conceptual framework.

Validity and Reliability

According to Salkind (2017), validity identifies whether data collection instruments are measuring the appropriate items. In qualitative research, there are several methods that can be used to determine validity, including triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2018). To maximize credibility, the researcher triangulated their qualitative findings through interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, the interviews were conducted as anonymously to protect the interviewers and to also support responses that were as honest and accurate as possible. Participants were chosen based on their direct support and knowledge of the studied work in hopes to cultivate responses that were grounded in validity.

Reliability is also an important consideration in a qualitative research study as it analyzes the stability of the instrument and the consistency of the respondents' answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, reliability examines the consistency of the study results and whether there was consistency in how the study was administered and how data was collected (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this study, there may have been discrepancy in the data when relying on administrators to self-report processes and access within the district or their building. According to Bowling (2005), social desirability bias speaks to the "over-reporting of desirable

behaviors, and the under-reporting of undesirable behaviors". Given that the researcher was collecting additional data points (e.g., document analysis) and the identities of the interviewees remained anonymous, these approaches aimed to offset this bias (Bowling, 2005).

Ethics

It was essential that during the data collection and analysis process, the researcher adhered to established ethical standards (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Glesne (2011), ethical codes guiding the research process include the concepts of informed consent, voluntary participation, and minimization of unnecessary risk. An essential element of this study was closely following the guidelines of informed consent. For this study, the researcher provided their proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Prior to this, the researcher received permission from MGPS to conduct the intended research within their school district. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and did not coerce or force participation, as participation was understood by the stakeholder group as voluntary (Creswell, 2014).

Consent was established with the participants during the interview process. Additionally, a request to access documents was also shared with district leadership to receive consent. The researcher worked with the superintendent's office to communicate with administrators and ask for voluntary participation. When conducting interviews, the researcher explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that the participant could stop the interview at any time and end their participation in the research study (Glesne, 2011). Once the participant agreed and was willing to participate, the researcher reviewed an information sheet with the participant with the goal of receiving their consent. Once consent was collected, the researcher proceeded with the qualitative interview.

There were other factors during the data collection process that were considered. The researcher demonstrated respect for both the participants and the interview site, was honest and transparent in all communications and interactions (direct and non-direct) with study participants, and practiced self-awareness and respect for any power imbalances (Creswell, 2014).

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative research study conducted in Mount Greenwood Public Schools (MGPS), a medium-sized, urban public-school district implementing purposeful efforts to increase the number of secondary students of color enrolled in college preparation coursework and programs. The analysis focused on the access that secondary

students of color have to college preparation coursework and the strategies and challenges that district administrators employ and face when creating this accessibility. While a complete study would include all stakeholders, for practical purposes, the stakeholder group on which this analysis focused was building and district-level administrators leading within the same public-school district.

As such, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?

2. What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how do they address them?

Participants

Data for the participants in this study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Administrator Participant Background Data

Participant	Gender	Race Identity	Administrator
Abbott	Female	Member of Minoritized Group	Building

Burke	Female	Member of Minoritized Group	Building
Carr	Female	Member of Minoritized Group	Building
Durkin	Female	Member of Minoritized Group	Building
Evans	Male	Member of Minoritized Group	District
Fitz	Female	White	Building
Geraghty	Male	White	Building
Hayes	Female	White	District
Ingle	Female	Member of Minoritized Group	District
Jackson	Female	White	District
Karp	Male	White	Building
Lynch	Female	White	Building

Research Question 1: How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?

The first research question asked, *how are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?* Through interviews and reviewed student transcripts, the findings emerged in the following categories: (a) calibration and collaboration, (b) disaggregating all data

by race, and (c) accessibility to college preparation courses/programs for all students. While other systems and structures for support were shared during the interview process, these findings were consistent throughout the data analysis. As such, they will be mentioned only in relation to the three prominent categories: calibration and collaboration, disaggregating all data by race, and accessibility to college preparation courses/programs for all students.

Finding 1: Calibration Between District Office and School Buildings

Calibration between school district administrators and individual building administrators is essential to creating college preparation coursework accessibility to secondary students of color. For an organization to be successful in creating accessible opportunities for all students, it is important that the organization is calibrated regarding the systems they have in place to implement these opportunities. This finding will uncover the areas in which MGPS administrators are calibrated in their efforts, as well as areas in which this is still evolving. These areas include district and building alignment, utilizing the "courageous conversations" framework, site equity leadership team (SELT), counseling and college/career support staff, partnership with students, partnership with families, and partnership with additional communities of color.

District and Building Alignment

As indicated by school district administrators, to create an aligned system that is calibrated on shared outcomes for students, it is important that district and building leadership are aligned and working together. This is important to be sure that individual buildings are not engaging in isolated practices, which can create discourse in equitable student access to college preparation coursework. Of the administrators interviewed, 12 out of 12 (100%), identified

calibration between the district and schools as a common district practice. When asked about

collaborative practices, while 8 out of 12 (67%) of all administrators identified collaboration as

an overall district practice, 4 out of those 12 (33%), all of which were building administrators,

felt there were areas for continued improvement in relation to how authentic collaboration

practices were. Participant Carr shared, "I have worked in four other districts, and I have never

before been a part of a system that is so aligned. It feels good to know we are all working toward

the same goals." Participant Karp agreed and shared, "As a seasoned educator in this district, I

have never felt clearer and more aware of what our collective goals are and how we are getting

there." Participant Hayes highlighted the district's strategic plan as the guiding force of the

calibration. "Everything we do goes back to that document, and we are finally at a place where

no one is confused about that. It is a driving force that was created by over 2,000 stakeholders."

"It is obvious when building leaders are not aligned. I think this is a testament to our overall

commitment to be a calibrated organization," shared Participant Evans. The identification of

highly calibrated efforts to align as a system further highlights the focus to create accessible

outcomes for students as it relates to college preparation coursework. "If you are an

administrator in MGPS, there shouldn't be confusion about what we are trying to accomplish

here. Our focus is equity for all of our [students] and commonality in how they navigate and

benefit from our opportunities, regardless of race," Participant Burke shared. Participant Lynch

further stated, "Our number one goal is to be sure that our [students] are successful after high

school in whatever path they choose. We know that happens through focused efforts to eliminate

barriers for them while they are in high school to access the necessary information they need to

succeed." "I very rarely enter conversations with other administrators where we are on different

pages about the end goal. This is due to a concerted effort by the district leadership to get us all

on the same page. It elevates the work and gets us to solutions quicker," Participant Geraghty

shared. Participant Abbott shared,

> We meet consistently as a secondary administrator team in regard to what courses
>
> we are offering and who is accessing them. And we have to answer to that and
>
> identify what practices our teams are putting into place to continue to emphasize
>
> opportunities for our students who are disproportionately accessing.

Practices identified by both district and building administrators that fostered calibration

include: common norms at the beginning of all meetings, work grounded and guided by

research-based practices, leadership book studies, use of multiple common data sources,

principal-led school improvement presentations, and tight alignment to the MGPS strategic plan.

As indicated through administrator interviews and the identification of aligned practices

to support student college preparation course accessibility, MGPS administrators highlighted the

benefits of being in a calibrated system to support this work.

"Courageous Conversations" Framework

MGPS identifies "courageous conversations" as an adaptive approach for leaders to use

when engaging in conversations with staff to support the "why" behind calibration (MGPS,

2020). As highlighted by 7 out of 12 (58%) of administrator interviews, this is a practice that has

been supported by the school district as evidenced by conference trainings, funding for district

and building leadership teams, and in administrator professional development during

leadership/principal meetings. Additionally, 8 out of 12 (67%) administrators interviewed

identified the need to have courageous conversations with their department and building teams

and cited a district focus on equity as the driving force behind their ability to do so. This was identified as a strategy that needs to work hand in hand with conducting conversations around race as it applies to student access at the course level. Participant Burke shared,

> As [woman of color], I can talk to you about the inequities of our data all day. But, I am having these conversations with a teaching population that is mostly White, so the learning I have done around conducting courageous conversations helps me to feel better prepared to frame the conversation.

Similarly, Participant Karp, a White leader, shared "I have grown so much over the years in my abilities to have conversations around race. I used to fear a courageous conversation, and now I welcome them. With kids at the heart of the work, I am able to more clearly convey my 'why', which I credit to our work around courageous conversations." "This is work that moves buildings, and it is helpful to be supported by the district with continual opportunities to engage in this learning," Participant Geraghty shared.

As identified by 9 out of 12 (75%) interviewed administrators, reviewing school or district data, while framing these conversations in ways that support staff to understand the "why" of the work, the courageous conversation framework has supported their leadership and equity teams in better positions to focus on the right data points that drive change in the classes students of color are accessing. "Our team sticks closely to the framework. We are clear about the 'why' we are doing this work and we root it in research and accurate data around our students who are accessing college preparation opportunities," Participant Abbott shared. Participant Durkin added,

I am proud of the work our staff is doing to call out the 'why' this work is

necessary. By framing our conversations around race, and this not being a

surprise, we are able to clearly outline our next steps to connect the right students

to opportunities.

The remaining three administrators did not specifically mention courageous conversations as a

strategy their team used, but this does not eliminate the possibility they do.

Framing the "why" in authentic ways, using courageous conversations, is a strategy that

administrators identified as important to guide equity and accessibility work in buildings. This is

important as the district adjusts building leadership practices to more intentionally guide building

equity work.

Site Equity Leadership Team

As indicated through administrator interviews, a promising practice that has emerged

from the 2020-2021 school year is a directive by the superintendent that building principals and

assistant principals combine their site-based leadership team and equity team (historically two

separate teams) to operate as one functioning team called the site equity leadership team (SELT).

Of the administrators interviewed, 10 out of 12 (83%) administrators identified this practice as

being an important shift that will support current and future work to create more well-defined

systems for students of color to equitably access college preparation coursework. This change,

Participant Ingle stated, "...is a direct acknowledgement that equity must be part of the work, not

'in addition to'." Participant Lynch shared that this team "must work together to cultivate an

instructional setting that considers equity at the heart of what they do and the decisions that are

made for the learning environment." Participant Fitz stated "This shift highlights that the work

cannot be siloed. Instruction and equity must go hand-in-hand and should not be reviewed in isolation." "Making targeted shifts to ensure that instruction and equity are the focus together, and not separately, is creating much more of a laser focus to this support problem," Participant Hayes added. The 2 out of 12 (17%) administrators who did not specifically highlight this shift were district-level administrators who are not currently leading a building leadership and/or equity team.

With a shared commitment to merge these teams, MGPS leadership will be able to collaborate around professional development and processes to promote alignment between SELTs. As this work grows, it will further support other systems which support calibration and collaboration between important school teams including the counseling and college and career specialists' teams. One way this work is being supported is by representation of counseling staff on the SELT.

Counseling and College/Career Support Staff

Partnership with staff members who have strong relationships with students is an essential practice to support accessibility to college preparation. As identified by 12 out of 12 (100%) MGPS administrators interviewed, counselors have direct impacts on the courses that students access over the course of their high school career and play a direct role in filling classes, creating schedules, and tracking data as it pertains to college preparation coursework accessibility for all students. "My counselor team is an essential part of connecting students, especially students of color. They have relationships and insight into courses that students need access to in order to support their postsecondary success," Participant Abbott shared. Participant Lynch stated,

I realized over the years that [counselors] kind of serve as gatekeepers into the courses and sequences that students take and the advising around those…this is why we have created alignment in our advising materials...it is all the same information to eliminate...so it's not up to chance for people to be doing things differently. It's not perfect...but we are well underway in this work.

Participant Carr, a building-level administrator, added "Counselors directly impact the classes that [students] access. So we, as the administrators, need to be sure we are working in collaboration with these staff members to further support outcomes." One way that participants, specifically 75% of school administrators, highlighted the ways that counselors impacted the work was to serve on the SELT. "Not only are we no longer isolating instruction and race, but we have knowledgeable people at the table to speak to and highlight this work at the [student] level," Participant Geraghty shared.

Counselors in MGPS meet monthly with the College and Career department and are trained in both technical and adaptive skills to support students. The principals to whom they report are also made aware of and receive the same training, so they can support and have calibrated expectations of how counselors are serving students in many areas, including accessibility to college preparation supports and programs. In collaboration with this team, the position of college and career specialist also supports student-focused outcomes as it pertains to college and career readiness. While 10 out of 12 (83%) administrators identified counselors as positively impacting student college preparation accessibility outcomes, only 2 out of 12 (17%) administrators, both building level, identified their counselors as having this ability, but might not be maximizing this role in their work. Of the ten administrators interviewed who identified

counselors at their school as having positive impacts on student access, they shared similar perspectives which indicated that the counselors at their sites (or district-wide) had the narrowest focus on individual students and the courses they were taking at that time. Of the administrators who work in a school setting, 75% (6 out of 8) identified that they have scheduled, consistent check-ins with their counseling teams to review student enrollment data and determine possible shifts in classes. These same administrators also identified that they had strong counselors who were familiar with their students and families. "I don't know what we would do [without the counselor]. She is committed to our kids and creates strong relationships that help us to gently push kids to experiences they may not have otherwise sought out," Participant Lynch shared.

Of the administrators leading specifically at the district level, 75% (3 out of 4) identified that, in collaboration with college and career specialists, the counseling department worked collaboratively with the teaching for learning (TFL) department to create the district course catalog and identify areas where there was misalignment of course offerings across the district. Many of these shared practices were a historical shift from years before when counselors primarily worked in isolation and most of their work was to support the emotional well-being of students instead of both the emotional and academic, as shared by 12 out of 12 (100%) administrators interviewed. "This is a very exciting shift, because our counselors have a valuable perspective that must be included to inform our academic practice [and] the gains we have seen in practice indicate that," Participant Hayes shared.

While strong relationships with school counseling staff play an important role in student accessibility to college preparation coursework, also important are the partnerships that schools form with the family of the students they support.

Partnership with Students

As directed by the superintendent during the 2019-2020 school year, all school sites must have a student advisory team that meets on a consistent basis to allow students the opportunity to provide feedback and actively support the planning of improvement measures for the school. As identified by 12 out of 12 (100%) administrators interviewed, this practice was informative to their work in creating multiple access points for students to engage in college preparation coursework and programs. Furthermore, 11 out of 12 (92%) administrators shared that students have a direct role, when possible, in determining the courses that the school offers. Participant Burke shared "Our course planning starts with [students]. What classes do they want to take? This year we offered AP Art Design. It was important to students that any student could access and take this college-level course." "After consulting with our [students], my team is always amazed at the perspective we were lacking. This includes the courses we offer. Often there are solutions we hadn't considered that [students] are able to provide viable solutions for," Participant Fitz shared. Participant Durkin said,

> Our partnership with [students] provides solutions to the problems we collectively face. I have students of color who are interested in AP classes, but the academic pathway chosen for them from middle school, and sometimes earlier, has prevented them from taking the required prerequisite courses. We are tackling this head on and identifying solutions with students at the table.

Of the 11 out of 12 (92%) administrators who identified that they included students in course planning, the same administrators also identified this practice as a strategy to strengthen

the relationships between school administration and student leaders and shared that this process

provides valuable perspectives that administrators must consider when supporting both student

academic and emotional needs. "We always say we learn so much when we talk to our kids. But

we get busy. When we prioritize this time, it comes back to us twofold and incredibly influences

the way we lead," Participant Lynch shared.

As identified by the administrators interviewed, partnerships with students either

increased college-level courses offered or has provided viable solutions to present additional

opportunities like this in the future. In addition to partnerships with students, administrators

identified the need to partner with families.

Partnership with Families

Partnership with families is an essential practice to support accessibility to college

preparation. As identified by 12 out of 12 (100%) administrators interviewed, there are district

aligned strategies that are facilitated district-wide to intentionally partner with families around

student success and accessibility for college and career readiness and preparation. The district

supports these opportunities in a variety of ways.

Student Led Conferences, or "SLCs", are a twice-yearly practice at all MGPS schools

that replaced previous traditional parent teacher conferences. In this model, the student is the

facilitator of the conversation around their progress and the teacher is there to provide support

and context. In the 2019-2020 school year, MGPS had 99% participation district-wide (MGPS,

2020). "SLCs are an important time for us to interact positively with families and share with

them the opportunities that we have available to their students," said Participant Karp.

Participant Geraghty shared, "It is helpful to have this established practice because we try to

maximize this opportunity with parents to teach about opportunities, but also collect feedback from them."

Another practice that MGPS uses district-wide to partner with families around college preparation is a variety of yearly events designed to educate and engage students and their families about post-secondary education and experiences. These events, as shared with families on the district website and included in promotional materials (posters, flyers, emails) include Life after High School, District Senior Support Nights, College and Trade Career Panels, Maia Learning Drop-In Nights, College Virtual Visits, FAFSA Nights, and High School Planning Night (MGPS, 2020). "These informational nights are so well done we promote as much as possible to families that have as much information as possible to support their child," Participant Fitz shared.

Finally, families must have the opportunity to engage in two-way communication with their schools and provide feedback on needs. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MGPS superintendent mandated that all MGPS principals would engage in twice a month Parent Zooms to share updates and provide direct feedback on what the school community could improve on. Additionally, the superintendent has also conducted twice a month session of their own. "These sessions have been so eye-opening, and I can't imagine discontinuing them after we return to schools," Participant Abbott shared. "The amount of informative feedback I receive to improve our school is invaluable to our team."

Engaging families is a practice that promotes partnership with the home to support college preparation. While authentic relationships with families is an important partnership, the most invaluable relationship we have is with the students we serve.

Partnership with Additional Communities of Color

Partnership with communities of color is an essential practice to support accessibility to college preparation coursework. As identified by 12 out of 12 (100%) administrators interviewed, there are district aligned strategies that are facilitated district-wide to intentionally partner with communities of color around student success and accessibility for college and career readiness and preparation. While the goal is for district staff members to provide comprehensive support and advocacy of students of color, there are additional community-based organizations that district secondary schools partner with to provide an additional level of support to students of color.

The most prominent organization that partners with all MGPS secondary schools is non-profit Communities in Schools (CIS). CIS is an organization that works directly inside individual schools to build meaningful relationships that empower students (focusing on students of color) to succeed both in and out of school (CIS, 2021). This support is accomplished through a caseload of students (primarily students of color) assigned to the coordinator. Administrators identified that CIS coordinators assigned to their sites supported students in a variety of ways including serving on the master scheduling team, working directly with administration to support goals for students of color, identifying and supporting barriers to attendance with students on their caseload, and locating resources to support low-income families of with basic needs. "What I appreciate most about CIS is the true partnership my team has with our coordinator. We work in collaboration to identify barriers and empower student voice and outcomes," Participant Lynch shared. Participant Abbot added "We work hard to create opportunities for students of color to provide input on decisions, including course offerings. There are times we are more successful

because we partner with CIS [to gather student input]." "CIS is a true partner in the work at [my school]. There are times their support gets us just a bit closer to meeting our goals to partner with students about course offerings," Participant Durkin also shared.

Finding 2: Disaggregating All Data by Race

As highlighted in the MGPS Strategic Plan (2020) core beliefs, the district states that "We believe that we must intentionally collaborate and use data as a guide to improve our practice" (MGPS, 2020). This section will unpack the various ways that MGPS staff, at both the district and building level, use disaggregated data to inform decision making and processes that impact students' preparedness for college in the areas of graduation rates, transcript tracking and course enrollment, and student attendance and participation.

Graduation Rates

Since the year 2012, MGPS has seen consistent growth over an 8-year period in student graduation rates, with the district graduating 70% of students (who entered as freshman) in 2012, to 88% in 2020 for an overall total growth rate of 18% (MGPS, 2020). This data, which is disaggregated by race, is used at the both the district and building level to inform decision-making and create next steps to support continued growth in this area across all races.

"This work begins in the Superintendent's office. Cabinet level staff meet to review both historical and current trend data and then make recommendations for goals across district departments and schools," Participant Ingle shared. All district-level participants (4 of 4) indicated that this data is reviewed throughout the calendar year to determine where areas of support are needed to positively impact both building and district graduation rates. "We take this data very seriously and work to identify what resources we can use to ensure we are supporting

students where they are at individually. We then work in collaboration with the buildings to understand where we can provide support," Participant Ingle further shared. Next, identified cabinet-level district leaders lead graduation assurance meetings at each secondary building each month to review this data at the building level. Participant Jackson also shared that during these meetings, district and building leadership, as well as the building counselor and college and career specialists, meet to review historical graduation data, current trend graduation data, and the common tools used to track this work. Each month, building leaders and support staff have deliverables to share, which include updated building graduation trend data (as indicated via the tracking tool), in order to collaborate on next steps for the coming month. Processes and conversations are race-based, as reflected by the action steps and goals determined by the team. Of the six secondary school tracking tools reviewed, 6 out of 6 (100%) included goal statements specifically around race data. "The goals are then shared with the superintendent and the cycle continues each month," Participant Ingle stated.

As shared by the interviewed participants, to create a clear and organized system for collecting and sharing data that is accessible by many administrators to engage in this work, the MGPS assessment team creates uniform spreadsheets on the Microsoft Teams platform. This document folder allows all leadership-level staff (including cabinet, department, building, and SELT) to access and review the data that each school shares. These spreadsheets are utilized and additionally reviewed during graduation assurance meetings that include district- and building-level staff. This process is then recreated by the building principal at their site equity leadership team (SELT) meeting.

Once collaboration occurs between district and building leaders, building administrators continue this cycle with their SELT, as shared by Participant Evans. "Student achievement and graduation trend data, broken down by race, is consistently reviewed by the SELT, as prepared by the district assessment department, to create building goals and to inform next steps around instruction, student access, and achievement," he shared. Of the eight building administrators interviewed, seven (88%) indicated that this data was consistently reviewed. "Reviewing data by race is the expectation and that is because that is the only way we are uncovering the targeted work that needs to be done," Participant Fitz shared. Participant Abbott also shared, "Guiding our teams to do this did not happen overnight. But it is now just 'what we do' and our goals and strategies to get there are so much more strategic and successful to support all [students]." "I have been in this district for [a long time] and it was when we started prioritizing this work to the race and student level that I saw us making real, authentic moves toward [student] success," Participant Lynch shared. Participant Geraghty, the remaining building administrator who identified his team as not yet fully engaged in this work to create school improvement goals indicated, "We would like to get there. I am finding that I am still onboarding my primarily White teacher team to understand the 'why' conversations like these need to occur. I wish we were further along."

Another area where district and building leaders collaborate is around retention rates of former students who attend post-secondary schools. "The reason I know what we are doing is working is that my team is seeing continued success in the number of students who are entering and staying in a post-secondary school environment," Participant Fitz, a building administrator, shared. Of the eight building administrators interviewed, 5 out of 8 (63%) identified this data as

informative to their work, while 3/8 did not mention this data point whatsoever in their experiences. This data collected and shared with district and building leaders, by race, provides an additional layer to the graduation growth successes to show that, not only are more students graduating, but the students that are graduating are also succeeding in their post-secondary experiences at higher rates. Participant Jackson, a district leader, shared "This is not a data point that we are obligated to collect, but we wanted to be sure that the successes we were seeing were valid. Our goal is not only to graduate kids, but to be sure they can succeed on their own once they graduate."

By focusing on the graduation rates of students throughout the year by race, MGPS is focusing efforts to create action plans for all students. This work begins at the district level which then supports the facilitation at the building level and continues throughout buildings as led by building administration. Another layer to this work occurs through continued collaboration at the district and building level focusing on student transcripts.

Transcript Tracking and Course Enrollment

As highlighted by district transcript data and participant interviews, transcripts serve as a resource to identify gaps of inaccessibility within a school system as well as identify the specific courses/programs that students of color may not be accessing (MGPS, 2020). As identified by the Education Trust in 2016 (NCES, 2016), inequities to access college preparation coursework exist within student transcripts. To eliminate inequities at this level, participants highlighted that they must directly focus on these gaps and create action plans to change course within their learning environments.

According to MGPS transcript data pulled for the 2019-2020 school year, provided to the researcher by the MGPS assessment department, 87% of MGPS high school students had transcripts that reflected college preparation coursework. Of this 87%, only 43% represented students of color who had transcripts that reflected college preparation courses, despite 67% of students identifying as a race other than White. Of the twelve administrators interviewed, all participants, when provided with this data by the researcher, identified this as an equity issue within the district and highlighted emerging practices which were started prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and are continuing to occur at both the district and building level.

In the 2018-2019 school year, after reviewing this data with district leadership and identifying this as an equity issue, the MGPS school superintendent contracted a consultant to support MGPS district and SELT teams to identify inequities at the transcript level and create action steps to eliminate these gaps within their departments/schools, as shared in participant interviews. When prompted, this was shared by all interviewed participants who were employed by the district during this school year. According to participant interviews, prior to social distancing requirements due to COVID-19, district and building administrators at the secondary level met with the consultant quarterly to engage in cycles of inquiry concerning transcripts of students across the district and in individual schools. Also evident from the interviews, this work has been particularly significant to the administrators interviewed as 12 out of 12 (100%) participants highlighted this work as impactful to the work of their leadership and master schedule teams. Participant Abbott shared, "We first reviewed national data and then zoomed in to our local MGPS data. Our data was embarrassing and highlighted the extreme inequities that exist for our students here at MGPS." Participant Jackson, a district-level administrator, stated,

The first time we went through the exercise of looking through [student]

transcripts by race to identify patterns of course taking, it was very unsettling.

Why had we not done this before? I was very uncomfortable sitting with the data

in front of me. It represented our work. It highlighted for us the inequities that we

were supporting within our own school and caused us to rethink how we were

connecting [students] with courses.

In each of the interviews it was clear that this work caused administrators to reflect on the

practices within their departments and schools and replicate these cycles of inquiry with their

SELT. Of the school administrators interviewed, 6 out of 8 (75%) reported that, by focusing on

student experiences at the individual transcript and schedule level, teams were better prepared

and focused to create master schedules that allowed for multiple entry points for students of

color to access college preparation coursework and programs. Participant Burke, a building-level

administrator, shared,

We had to rewrite how we did this work. Clearly our previous practices, though

well intended, were harming our kids of color. We took this new information and

reconstructed how we built our master schedule and how we considered our kids

of color through each component of the master scheduling process.

"Our principal teams knew we could not return back to our buildings and create siloed practices.

We worked first in collaboration with one another to determine how we would then support this

work in our buildings," Participant Carr stated. Participant Geraghty highlighted, "This work

created a jolt of energy in our admin team and we knew we needed to shift practice in a big way.

So that's what we did and are continuing to do."

Reviewing student transcripts by race is an emerging practice that 12 out of 12 administrators (100%) identify as impactful to the work they are leading at school sites. Another practice that all building-level participants identified to support student success, by race, is tracking enrollment of students in college preparation coursework in individual classes.

In addition to tracking student access to college preparation coursework at the transcript level, 7 out of 8 (88%) building administrators identified that their building teams additionally collaborate to review racial enrollment data in courses to track and identify which students are taking which classes to better identify areas where class enrollment is disproportionate by race. Though this process, as reported by individual building leaders, varies in practice at each building, 7 out of 8 (88%) building administrators identified that this process informs and prompts conversations and next steps to right-sizing enrollment in individual classes. Participant Carr shared, "We meet monthly as an admin team and counselors to review data and determine 'Who's on first' to have conversations with individual students. We often find that students thought [a particular class] 'wasn't for them.'" Of the administrators interviewed, 7 out of 8 (88%) also shared that reviewing this data for trends allows them to have conversations at the student level to provide students with the option of a class it is believed they would be successful in. The remaining building administrator did not highlight this as a practice at their school, but also did not indicate it wasn't happening, either.

By identifying individual classes where individual students may be successful and having direct conversations to support their enrollment, secondary schools in MGPS are attempting to right-size disproportionate class enrollment by race. Another important factor to this work

closely is monitoring student attendance and participation in all classes, including those classes
which prepare them for college.

Student Attendance and Participation

As identified by MGPS administrators, attendance data is an additional important data
point used by building teams to identify whether students are accessing the necessary
information needed to prepare them for college. As previously mentioned, MGPS identifies data
as a guide to improve practice. This core belief acknowledges that multiple data points are
necessary to unpack the full range of student needs (MGPS, 2020). If students are not engaged
and participating in school, then their chances of succeeding will be significantly impacted
(Banks, 2008). To collect comprehensive data in these areas, MGPS collects and collaborates on
the following attendance data: daily attendance, student led conferences, and college and career
events.

In accordance with district policy and as identified by 12 out of 12 (100%)
administrators, each of their school sites has a functioning attendance team which meets monthly
to review student attendance data, by race, and create individualized action plans for students
who are not attending or who need support to attend school more regularly, as indicated by the
MGPS Attendance Team Handbook. The individualized plans are documented and reviewed, in
cycles, at monthly attendance meetings. "This team consists of school administrators, a district
liaison, support staff, and teaching staff," Participant Geraghty shared. From this meeting often
comes opportunities to partner with the student and their family to review their class schedule
and determine next steps for support. This data is also presented twice a year to the
superintendent's team, by the school principal, to identify areas of success and areas of growth

for each building site. This practice, as identified by principal participants, helps to drive areas of improvement in their attendance data. "It is a priority of our district to have our [students] coming to school. This is a data point I am held accountable for and that I hold my team accountable for," Participant Karp shared.

Another data point to which schools are held tightly is student-led conference (SLC) data. As previously mentioned, with a yearly goal of 100% attendance, school teams are encouraged to intentionally work together to engage students and their families in focused conversations about student success and support. Additionally, attendance at district college and career events is also tracked to monitor the families who are participating so school teams can provide additional outreach, if needed. Participant Hayes shared,

> At all these events, we have district college and career staff who take attendance,
> by name, at all entry points. This information is then shared directly with the
> building college and career specialist at each site, so they can follow up with
> those who attended and, more importantly, meet with those who did not attend to
> share the information they missed.

Tracking attendance and participation and planning for how to engage families when they attend events is a promising strategy to provide families with information they may need to support their student to pursue college readiness opportunities. However, schools must also have accessible entry points for all students to be able to access college preparation coursework and programs.

Finding 3: Accessibility to College Preparation for All Students

As highlighted by participant interviews and district documentation, to participate in college preparation coursework and programs, all students must have accessible ways to engage in this work with equitable entry points. One way to accomplish this is to have direct access points for students of color to enroll in these types of courses and/or programs. This section discusses the opportunities and access points that have been established and highlights key components of this structure including a guaranteed and viable curriculum, district course catalog, and whole district/school college preparation frameworks.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Of all the administrators interviewed in this study, 12 out of 12 (100%) identified the district guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC) as a strategy that ensures all students receive a fair and accessible education. A GVC provides students access to a comprehensive, equitable, rigorous, and standards-based curriculum in core content subjects that is consistent across all traditional school sites. "Our GVC really helped to 'even' the playing field in regard to the instruction and embedded strategies that all students receive. It ensures consistency of content that we were previously lacking as a system," Participant Ingle shared. Over the past five years, MGPS' curriculum department has worked alongside district departments and teachers to create and implement a GVC. The MGPS GVC is a district-wide curriculum for core content classes that was created by district teachers for district teachers (MGPS, 2020). This ensures that district students, regardless of the school they attend, receive access to the same curriculum and strategies and follow a two-week pacing guide so that, should they need to move between schools, they will be no more than two weeks ahead or behind content they are familiar with. All

traditional schools in the district utilize the GVC as their main curriculum resource as this is a

tightly-held agreement based on shared decision-making between district leadership and the local

teacher's union. While the GVC is not yet adopted for the honors or AP-level classes, it provides

all students with a rigorous curriculum to prepare them for college. Additionally, 8 out of 12

(67%) participants specifically highlighted this as an equity issue that the district faced in the

past. Participant Hayes shared, "Prior to developing our GVC, schools across our district used

various curriculum sources and sequences. This created so many inequities of programming for

so many kids, especially students of color."

By considering and executing a multi-approach system to support all students with

college preparation opportunities, the district ensures college preparation skill building,

regardless of the level of the classes. This is done by considering the district-wide and

school-wide approaches, as well as curriculum, to support all students.

District Course Catalog

During the 2018-2019 school year, MGPS created and implemented a comprehensive

district course catalog which is available to all families, printed in many languages, and serves as

an anchor for district-wide offerings. This ensures consistent communication regarding

opportunities for all students across four comprehensive traditional high schools and 6

comprehensive traditional middle schools. While there may be some variance between individual

schools, all courses have been formally approved and courses cannot be changed, altered, or

removed without a formal approval process, which varies greatly from the process prior to the

formal adoption of the course catalog.

Evident from the interviews, the district course catalog is a guiding document strictly followed by all administration and master scheduling teams in the process of creating a yearly master schedule. Of the administrators interviewed, 10 out of 12 (83%) identified the course catalog as an essential, non-negotiable resource that their master schedule teams closely follow when determining course options for students so that courses are aligned as a district. The two remaining building leaders did not explicitly mention this as a resource their teams use, but this is to be inferred as only courses within the catalog can be included in master schedules. "I appreciate the consistency in courses now. Before, high schools were all over the place with what they were offering, and it felt competitive. We didn't know how to keep up," Participant Fitz shared. Participant Abbott echoed, "Having consistent and clear course offerings provides equitable opportunities and better positions us to say, 'The high school closest to you provides just as many opportunities to succeed and participate in college readiness." This consistency allows for students, regardless of the school they attend in the district, the opportunity to access the same courses titles and curriculum as their peers. This work, combined with the transcript tracking efforts previously mentioned, ensure alignment between courses offered and the processes that schools are putting in place to ensure students of color are directly provided with the knowledge, opportunity, and accessibility to take college-level courses.

Accessible individual course offerings are one aligned strategy that promotes equitable access to college preparation coursework, but college readiness cannot occur within isolated, independent courses. Schools must determine programmatic approaches to support all students toward college preparedness.

Whole District and School College Preparatory Frameworks

Whole district and whole school frameworks prioritize a commitment to supporting all students with accessibility to college preparedness. In the 2020-2021 school year, MGPS adopted the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program as a district-wide approach to supporting all students become college and career ready. The AVID framework creates highly collaborative, safe learning environments for students with high expectations for students and staff (AVID, 2020). Prior to the 2020-21 school year, each traditional secondary school had adopted AVID in varying degrees at their school sites, but in the 2020-21 school year, the superintendent launched a committed approach to utilizing AVID strategies in a systemized way across all secondary schools. To promote and support this commitment, district professional development for teachers and principals has embedded AVID strategies to model the strategies outlined within the AVID framework. "I am glad we are finally launching AVID as a non-negotiable support to students. These are strategies I have seen make a difference and prepare diverse students to apply and stay in college," Participant Jackson shared. Participant Abbott echoed, "This was the push we needed to really commit to this framework. With so much going on it is hard to prioritize what is best and I think our efforts here will go far."

Each traditional secondary school in MGPS has historically adopted a college and career "whole school" framework between the district-sanctioned options of Cambridge Assessment International Education Program (CAIEP) or International Baccalaureate (IB). Typically, the adoption is based on the home high school with feeder pattern middle schools choosing the same program and the decision making around the selected program is specific to the school site. These college preparation programs, although different, provide a whole school approach to supporting students with college preparation strategies and curriculum. Of the twelve

administrators interviewed, nine identified these frameworks as a focused resource to support

student college preparation. The remaining three, though familiar and/or running these

frameworks at their sites, did not specifically highlight these frameworks. "There is some

valuable work happening within the Cambridge and IB programs. The district is committed to

supporting the professional development opportunities for school staff to support these

frameworks," Participant Ingle, a district administrator, shared. Participant Fitz, a building

administrator, shared, "...these frameworks are a great launch pad for including all students in

this work."

While a consistent, whole district and school framework focused on college preparation

outcomes is a notable strategy, it is important to note this resource also requires many

considerations for building leaders, including other college preparation coursework opportunities

and availability in the master schedule. Another layer of support is found in the curriculum that

is offered to all students in core subjects.

Research Question 2: What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how

do they address them?

The second research question asked, *What challenges do school/district administrators*

encounter and how do they address them? Through interviews, observations, and reviewed

artifacts, the findings emerged in the following categories: (a) collaboration, (b) master schedule,

and (c) meeting individual student needs. While other challenges were present, these findings

were consistent throughout the data analysis. Since these findings were consistent between most,

but not all, interviews, they will be mentioned only in relation to the three prominent categories

of collaboration, master schedule, and meeting individual student needs.

Finding 1: Collaboration

Building administrators of MGPS expressed dissatisfaction with the collaboration between district and building leaders, specifically as it applied to connecting students with college and career preparation opportunities. While 8 out of 8 (100%) building administrators highlighted a strong sense of calibration with district leaders, 6 out of 8 (75%) identified collaboration as an area that they felt was lacking to be able to properly support their buildings. Participant Burke, a building administrator, shared, "I understand and know what my district expects from me. However, there are intricacies at some buildings that don't always align fully, and I don't always feel there is a commitment to understand those differences." Participant Durkin agreed that they wished "there were more authentic opportunities to intentionally collaborate with district leadership so that calibration can be even more genuine." Participant Abbott echoed, "There hasn't been an intentionality I have experienced to bring the principal's voice to the table. Yet, we are the ones trying to determine how to create opportunities and that is difficult without clear direction." "District leaders meet often with principals, but it is rigid, and the 'protocol' guides discussion to be controlled by the district leaders. I don't feel I can freely share my needs and that is frustrating," Participant Geraghty stated. Meanwhile, 4 out of 4 (100%) district administrators shared they felt that there were strong collaboration opportunities between district and building leaders. "Everything we do is grounded in collaboration," stated Participant Ingle, a district administrator. "There are rarely decisions that are made that do not include stakeholder voice. It's just now how we do things." Participant Evans, another district administrator echoed, "We cannot do this work without principal voice. We need to be sure we are considering all barriers that schools may be facing."

This disparity of the data and perspectives between district and school administrator experiences, regarding authentic collaboration, highlights a clear challenge with all district administrators feeling a strong sense of collaboration with building leaders and most building administrators not feeling the authentic collaboration. One specific area of building administrator feedback called attention to challenges around the master schedule as a tool to support accessibility to college preparation courses to all students.

Finding 2: Master Scheduling

A secondary school master schedule is a complex system which must incorporate and consider many components including the number of course offerings a school can offer students, as well as when they occur during a school week/day. Of the administrators interviewed, 8 out of 8 (100%) MGPS school leaders identified their building's master schedule as a key challenge to providing accessibility to college preparation courses for all students due to the way the schedule is built, established pathways and tracks they must support, and a lack of direction from the district office.

Building a Master Schedule

A building master schedule affects the overall course offerings that a school has available to its student population. Just a few considerations that a master schedule at a school must have, as it relates to this problem of practice, include number of periods, established whole school frameworks, and honors/AP level class offerings. Of the building administrators interviewed, 5 out of 8 (63%) interviewed shared that their building master schedule is built as a team effort, with multiple staff members supporting the process including administrators, department heads, and counselors. "There are no surprises," Participant Abbott shared. "We create a skeleton and

then have a clear process for department heads to weigh in. With everyone at the table, staff can

better understand the intricate process and understand why decisions are made." Participant Carr

shared, "This is a multilayered process and we do our best to support all those layers by bringing

people to the table." Meanwhile, 3 out of 8 (38%) building administrators reported that their

building master schedules are typically built in isolation by the principal and select staff

members review and provide feedback. "I want to get creative, but feel my hands are tied to so

many competing factors," Participant Durkin stated. "In the end there is only so much I can fill

in, so it is not the collaborative process I would like." Of the district administrators interviewed,

2 out of 4 (50%) admitted they had a surface level understanding of how master schedules were

built at individual school sites, but said they had a general understanding of how a school

schedule would be created. "I would say I am somewhat removed from this process. I also have

not yet created a master schedule before," Participant Hayes shared. The remaining 2 out of 4

(50%) district administrators shared they had previously engaged in building a master schedule

in their career.

Despite course offerings intended to be equitable across all grade bands within the

district, the way in which schools are offering courses, within their master schedule, varies

significantly. With the ability, at this current time, to determine the number of periods a student

accesses within a day happening at the building level, there are different practices between

schools. Of the four comprehensive high schools in the district, two have a "four-by-four"

schedule which is an 8-period schedule spread out in every other day fashion, while the other

two have all periods (one with 6, one with 7) offered within a day, according to participant

interviews. This variance in scheduling creates a disparity in total minutes to core content, as

well as access to total minutes of college preparation coursework. Students attending all classes everyday results in increased access to all content. The same is also true for middle schools in the district. With middle schools offering anywhere from six to eight classes within a given school day, students then have varied access to core content and college preparation coursework. While building administrators acknowledge this disparity, they also highlighted the challenges attributed to this problem.

"It is so difficult to fit everything in. With so many competing factors and a responsibility to serve them all, something must give. The 4x4 schedule allows us to fit in the greatest number of classes a student can take so that is what we have to go with," Participant Abbott shared. Participant Fitz also shared, "Our state standards for graduation is to complete twenty-four credits, but in our district, it is twenty-seven. This ensures rich opportunities for our [students] but then we also must consider the other pathways and tracks that make it difficult…" Participant Lynch stated, "We are told to make it work, but very few of our direct superiors have worked at the secondary level, and we can't just do that. So often we have to cut essential opportunities because of a lack of support from up top." Of the eight building administrators interviewed, 5 out of 8 (63%) agreed with similar responses.

This variance in practice and understanding of how a master schedule is built highlighted an autonomy that building leaders later expressed frustration with, preferring a top-down model for how to include all competing factors into an equitable master schedule offering for all students. An additional challenge, in relation to master schedule challenges, that administrators identified was the creation of tracks within college preparation pathways.

Supporting Pathways: Tracking and Cost

As shared earlier in the findings, all secondary schools in MGPS are expected to support the AVID framework as well as one school-selected college preparation program of IB or Cambridge. Often, although not always, middle schools choose the program that is supported by their feeder high school. These frameworks/pathways require course offerings that school must fit into their school schedules. Three challenges of these framework/programs, as identified by building administrators, are the early tracking of students prior to high school, student navigation of these pathways, and the lack of calibration between schools of how to offer these programs with fidelity.

Prior to high school, most, but not all, middle school students have access to AVID and their school selected college preparation program (IB or Cambridge). However, beginning in the 6th grade, some students can take higher level math and ELA classes in alignment to these programs, based on elementary standardized test scores. These classes serve as tracks that often divide students academically throughout middle and high school, as highlighted by 6 out of 6 (100%) traditional middle or high school administrators. "By the time they get to ninth grade, so often their academic trajectory has been set. So, the notion that everyone starts high school with an even clean slate is inaccurate," Participant Durkin shared. Participant Lynch shared, "We really do try our best to review test scores and move students we feel are ready. But, often, they come to middle school with levels or course pathways in place." "Inequities exist from the moment they walk through the door as ninth graders. We are sent a crop of white kids performing at higher levels than our students of color," Participant Carr shared. Of the traditional building administrators interviewed, 6 out of 6 (100%) identified a need to undo the tracking that happens within elementary and middle school. "The issue is, so many of these tracks are

perpetuated by the college preparation pathway that is supposed to be in place to support all students...but that is not what we are ending up with," Participant Karp shared. While 6 out of 6 (100%) traditional building administrators identified both IB and Cambridge as celebrated programs within their schools, they highlighted unintended equities that result from the way students are accessing these programs. Participant Fitz stated,

> So much of how these program offerings show up in our master schedule are due to the work that is done prior to high school. We then must support the tracks in place and be sure the sequential offerings of classes students need are within our schedule. Not offering them would prevent opportunities. It is a cycle we struggle with, and ultimately students struggle in.

Another concern highlighted by 9 out of 12 (75%) administrators was how the pathways additionally affect AP course offerings. "It is difficult to offer a robust AP catalog at your school where you are, literally, trying to plug in courses wherever you can," Participant Fitz shared. Participant Abbott echoed, "By the time we consider department schedules and ensure access to our AVID and IB/Cambridge courses, AP gets the leftover [time slots] every time...which is sad considering the topic of this study." Finally, Participant Burke also shared, "We say [student] voice matters, and I believe it does. But I have kids of color who are coming to me asking for specific AP offerings and I cannot honor their requests due to a variety of constraints."

An additional concern identified by the administrators interviewed is the cost factor associated with supporting third-party frameworks. As Participant Ingle shared, the district is committed to supporting professional development opportunities for whole school college

preparation frameworks. However, 5 out of 6 (83%) building administrators who identified these frameworks as important resources also highlighted the challenges to full implementation. "I am all in on our chosen program. However, the required ongoing PD requires many resources and scheduling considerations that I greatly struggle to implement" Participant Fitz shared. Participant Abbott echoed, "These frameworks are owned by businesses that need to make a profit. So, with the number of staffs needing to be trained, specifically by their businesses, this causes a gap in staff knowledge and implementation."

College preparation pathways, and the tracks that are created within them, limit the access that all students must participate in college preparation and coursework. As a part of, and in addition to, this challenge, school administrators further identified a challenge in supporting all students and meeting their individual needs.

Finding 3: Meeting Individual Student Needs

Of the school administrators interviewed, 11 out of 12 (92%) identified meeting individual student needs, as it relates to access to college preparation coursework, as a challenge. One challenge to this, they collectively identified, were constraints around master scheduling. "Because there is so much to fit into the schedule already, there is no time available to offer interventions or acceleration classes," Participant Burke shared. Similarly, Participant Abbott shared, "No matter how we try to make it work, it doesn't. Time is not a luxury that we have to be creative to meet individual student needs. And often, it is our students of color who struggle the most."

One component, as identified by 9 out of 12 (75%) administrators interviewed, are the differences between college preparation coursework offered at schools across the district.

"Because there is autonomy within the school site, and feeder patterns don't always align, the way schools are offering their programs is not well aligned...that's a next step we are missing...," Participant Jackson, a district administrator, highlighted. Participant Ingle agreed, "There is such variance between program offerings by school. Some have been doing this work for years and have great gains to show for it. Others are struggling to begin. Where would you want your child to go?" "There is where we need more eyes and ears from above," Participant Lynch, a building administrator shared. "We recognize working in silos is not working to meet the needs of our kids. Let's work together to change that."

An additional concern to supporting individual students is the, at times, rigidity of the district course catalog as it related to offering new courses. With the various programming opportunities that MGPS attempts to offer, a course catalog that is "held tight" does not come without some complications. Of the eight building administrators interviewed, 4 out of 8 (50%) administrators shared that there are times they would like to use student feedback to get creative with course offerings, but then are not approved or cannot move forward because the class is not outlined in the course catalog. "I get it, but it is also frustrating. I meet with students and we identify a class that would provide a college preparation access point in the area of study with a lot of interest, but we need to quickly abandon the idea because it is not approved," Participant Fitz shared. Similarly, Participant Burke highlighted their frustration around rigid course offerings. "I want partnerships with students to be authentic. But I do feel like my hands are tied at times because I am supposed to gather their feedback but then I cannot follow through and I feel they lose trust".

Summary

Providing accessible college preparation opportunities for students requires calibration and collaboration between district and building leadership. By creating authentic ways to align, school leaders will have a clear and aligned vision to prepare students for college. Additionally, by disaggregating all data by race, district and building administrators will be better equipped to identify gaps in access as it pertains to racial groups and strategically allocate resources to meet student group needs. Finally, using curriculum in core classes to provide equitable access to content that prepares students for college level work positions the district to offer common experiences that have been approved and refined as needed to support student growth and success.

Despite having strategies in place to provide access to college preparation coursework for all students, true accessibility for all students does not come without its challenges. One challenge MGPS building administrators highlighted was a need for authentic collaboration with district leadership to create equitable opportunities for students across the district. Next, administrators cited the lack of flexibility within a secondary master schedule as a barrier to access for students. This, they said, provided the final challenge of being able to meet individual student needs.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter will discuss findings, based on the research, conducted in this qualitative

study as it relates to college preparation access for secondary students of color. These findings

will include the need for authentic partnerships with families, collaboration and calibration with

accountability, and the need for a master schedule framework that allows students to access a

variety of college preparation course options.

Findings

The findings of this study provided a clear connection between both the literature and the

contextual framework for which this study is based on, as well as provide additional

considerations for this focus of study. Of the three main recommendations for practice, there

were strong connections to prior research to support the findings including the importance of

authentic partnerships with students, families, and communities of color. Further

recommendations include school districts creating accountable systems to support accessible

outcomes for students of color and ensuring that college preparation coursework is culturally relevant and accessible to all students.

The connection between the authentic partnerships with students and families was highlighted in both the literature and in the process of how the school district and schools are creating opportunities for partnership to share and gather feedback from communities of color. As highlighted by Farmer-Hinton (2008), it is important to include communities of color when decisions are being made as to how best support them. This was particularly noticeable in gathering student input on course offerings and frequent opportunities to learn and provide information about college preparation and coursework to both students and families. Furthermore, the literature points out that, to create a learning environment that serves the intended population and promotes culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices, it is important to listen and learn based on the population a district is serving (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019). As Means (2019) points out, this act of listening and learning to support the population being served, supports school districts to disrupt practices and policies that are grounded in "deficit-oriented perspectives" of students of color and their families. These aligned strategies address the macrosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem of the conceptual framework. The macrosystem represents the students' and families' cultures and the need to partner with students and families for outcomes specific to students of color. The mesosystem identifies the importance of relationship and the need to provide opportunity to familial representation on college access and course outcomes as well as the continued importance to provide opportunities for authentic partnerships and representation from family and community members. Finally, the

microsystem, which includes family, school staff, and community members, is the environment closest to the child that is typically most influential and impactful to outcomes in their life.

Next, the finding of school districts needing to create accountable systems to support accessible outcomes for students of color was supported by the literature by identifying the need for targeted support from the district and individual buildings as represented in disaggregated racial data. Despite students of color having proportional capability to perform in college preparation coursework (Dougherty et al., 2005; Sadler, 2007), there are multiple references from the literature which highlight the disproportionate graduation rates of students by race in the United States (Cooper et al., 2018; NCES, 2008; U.S. Census, 2010). Additionally, there are multiple references from the literature that highlight the lack of access to rigorous, college preparation coursework by students of color as compared to White peers (Abram et al., 2011; College Board, 2014; Education Trust, 2014; Ford, 2013). This data helps to serve as individual data points to support the identification of interventions, resources, and supports needed for individual student racial groups. These strategies, as supported by the research, include creating accountable protocols for ensuring disaggregated data sets are in all decision making to support students of color. Examples of this data include reviewing the following data sets by race: transcript course selection and completion by race, course enrollment by race, graduation rates, and attendance/participation. The findings also point to ensuring the site equity leadership team (SELT) creates building goals for this data. These strategies were directly supported with the chronosystem and exosystem levels of the conceptual framework. The chronosystem identifies that, due to Affirmative Action, shifts in support for students of color are necessary to change outcomes for students of color. Next, the exosystem identifies situation challenges that exist for

students of color including accessibility to college prep courses, curriculum, and course pathways.

Finally, the third finding of the need to create systems to support accessibility for culturally relevant coursework opportunities for students of color was identified by literature in the need for flexible pathways to multiple access points for students of color within the master schedule through culturally relevant college preparation content. Students of color are 25% less likely than their White peers to hold a school transcript reflecting college readiness and 50% less likely to be enrolled in college preparation coursework (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; NCES, 2016). Because of this, school communities in the United States are exploring actionable strategies and interventions to address inequitable access to college preparation coursework and programming (Levine & Zimmerman, 2010). Examples of coursework that MGPS employs to support this disparity include access to multiple college preparation coursework opportunities including a guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC), increased Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, and three whole-school frameworks of International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge (CAIEP), and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID). Additionally, the research uncovered that this problem cannot only be solved by classes being available, but that a viable master schedule must be in place to support the access to these courses and that processes are needed to engage and enroll students of color in these courses. This finding is supported by the exosystem level of the conceptual framework that identifies the need to create accessible, college preparatory pathways for students of color.

These findings, as aligned to the literature and contextual framework, address the problem of practice by creating a research-based set of strategies for school districts to consider

supporting equitable outcomes for students of color as it relates to access to college preparatory coursework. These multi-tiered strategies consider the multiple layers and circumstances within a student's learning environment to cultivate authentic and culturally responsive opportunities for students of color.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Practice**</div>

Recommendation 1: Creation of Authentic Partnerships with Students, Families, and Community Members of Color at the District and School Level

This section recommends strategies that both districts and schools can employ to cultivate authentic partnerships with students, families, and community members of color regarding accessing college preparation coursework. The recommendations for the district level include broad, district-wide opportunities for students and families to engage with college preparation information course taking opportunities. At the school level, recommendations include both broad, school-side and direct, personalized strategies to meet individual student and family needs.

Districts must create authentic partnerships with students, families, and communities of color to support a student's ability to access college preparatory coursework. As Farmer-Hinton (2008) points out, it is important to include communities of color when determining how to best support communities of color. To create a learning environment that promotes culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices, it is important to listen, learn, and act based on the population one is serving (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019). Means (2019) highlights that support from family, school staff, and community partnerships is the most important of three areas that will highly support students and encourage them to prepare, plan, and attain information needed to

fulfill college and career aspirations. These partnerships are particularly important because they are represented within three important levels of the student's environment (exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem), including the microsystem, which includes the relationships closest to the students in their everyday life and is critical to their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the microsystem is composed of a student's family, school staff members, and community members.

Authentic partnerships with students are a critical component of authentically supporting them to access and succeed in college preparation coursework. The MGPS Strategic Plan (2020) states that, "We believe that our [students] must have a voice, see themselves in their schooling, and be connected to the adults that teach them." Of the data collected from interviewed administrators, all administrators identified that student advisories to leadership were in place at the district and building levels and meeting regularly to listen and learn from the students in their learning environments and to understand the barriers they face. In practice, student advisories are student groups which meet on a consistent basis with district and school leadership to provide input regarding how the district and/or school is operating as well as provide feedback on the culture/climate of the district and/or school. They work with administrators to co-create policies or strategies for the school to implement to support the concerns that are identified. Likewise, these meetings are also opportunities for students to identify things that are positive and going well so that administrators can be sure to continue replicating this success. Regarding student access to college preparation coursework, administrators identified that student feedback from these meetings was and is used by administrators in a variety of ways, with the strongest evidence supporting the strategies of rethinking and restructuring access points to curriculum,

informing available course offerings, and participating in course planning. This practice is supported by the work of Haskins and Kemple (2009) who states that districts should rethink how they are encouraging students of color to enroll in and complete college preparatory courses. This work allows students of color to be directly involved in the decision-making process of systems that directly impact their access to college preparation coursework.

Authentic partnerships with parents and guardians allow them to support access to college preparation coursework, navigate their child's education, and allow for informative two-way communication between the school and home. This is especially true for families of color who have been disproportionately affected by racialized policies and practices regarding educational access and attainment (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). As outlined in a pillar of the MGPS strategic plan (2017) "Safe Climate and Strong Relationships with Families and Community", it states that the district (and all staff) will embrace families as essential stakeholders in the education of all students and that staff will cultivate trust and mutual respect through shared responsibility and decision making for student success, communication, and stakeholder voice. Additionally, one of the core beliefs of the MGPS strategic plan is "We believe that our families are critical partners in each child's learning" (MGPS, 2020). Of the data collected from interviewed administrators, all administrators identified that there are district facilitated strategies to intentionally partner with families on student success and accessibility for college preparation. These strategies include parent advisory to the superintendent (which operates similarly to the previously mentioned student advisories), twice yearly student led conferences (SLCs), high school planning night, FAFSA support nights, college virtual nights, Maia Learning support nights, college and career panels, senior support nights, and "life after high school"

night. These events provide both district and school leaders with the opportunity to engage directly with families regarding college preparation. Additionally, each building schedules a twice monthly "Parent Zoom" to share and collect information from parents around how the school can better support students and families. A few specific topics that administrators collect feedback on, as it relates to access to college preparation and coursework include input on course offerings, available pathways and tracks (IB/Cambridge), and advanced placement (AP), as well as any barriers their student may be experiencing to access courses. Post COVID social distancing requirements, these meetings will be offered both virtually and in-person. This work allows families to provide direct feedback to the staff members who are directly responsible to create access to college preparation coursework.

Authentic partnerships with communities of color is an essential strategy to further support students and families of color to create meaningful relationships with the school community. Including community members of color will disrupt practices that are grounded in "deficit-oriented perspectives" of students of color and their families and will support the work of creating curriculum and policies that are culturally relevant and comprehensive for students of color (Means, 2019). Additionally, Farmer-Hinton (2008) highlighted the importance of schools developing networks and community models that are directly within the environment, to provide students with knowledge and focus on both academics and social-emotional support. Data collected by all administrators highlighted the additional supports within their buildings that are directly attributed to "Communities in Schools" mentors who are chosen to represent the populations they are supporting to mentor and support students and their families as they navigate school and opportunities within the school system. These mentors are included as a

member of the school staff to support and advocate for students of color. While support and advocacy for students is the responsibility of all staff of the district, this organization provides an additional layer of support to be sure students and families are supported. They collect feedback from families and share this information with the school leadership to strengthen systems within the school community.

Authentic partnerships with students, families, and community members of color is a multi-faceted way to collect meaningful feedback to inform access to college preparation coursework for students of color that is culturally relevant and impactful.

Recommendation 2: Create Accountable, Multi-Tiered Systems of Calibration and Collaboration at the District and School Level to Support Accessible Outcomes for Students of Color

This section recommends accountable calibration and collaboration between district and school leaders to create multi-tiered systems of support for students of color. The recommendation for all leaders (district and school) is to engage in continuous review of disaggregated data when making decisions about student success. The recommendations for district level leaders include creating systems that hold district, school, and staff accountable to this practice, as well as intentional and collaborative, two-way efforts between district and school leaders in regard to creating systems that will impact their students the most. At the school level, recommendations include collaborative and focused efforts within building leadership equity teams to make common goals, using disaggregated data, to support student success outcomes. All of these recommendations must incorporate accountable metrics to ensure collaboration is occurring in the recommended ways.

School districts must create accountable, multi-tiered systems of calibration and collaboration to support accessible outcomes for students of color. As stated throughout the four pillars of the MGPS strategic plan (2017), it is identified that, as a system, MGPS must intentionally collaborate, have shared responsibility for student success, establish a clear standard of professional practice and accountability, foster alignment, and meet individual needs of each student. Additionally, the strategic plan states one of their core beliefs as "We believe that race, socioeconomics, language, cultural background, and other exceptionalities should not be predictors of student achievement" (MGPS, 2020). Students who access college preparation coursework and/or classes are better positioned to enroll in and attend college (Iatarola et al., 2011). When given the ability to access college preparation classes, students of color do not significantly underperform as related to their White peers (Dougherty et. al, 2005). As highlighted by Alon (2009), despite graduating and participating in college coursework at lower rates then White peers, students of color perform at the same level when provided with support, opportunity, and access. Therefore, districts must create collaborative systems that hold administrators and staff accountable to create targeted support and equitable opportunities for students of color, using racial equity data to create goals and measure success. In MGPS, these systems have begun starting with the creation of the district strategic plan. This comprehensive plan, co-created with stakeholders, provides a theory of action, with expectations, for how stakeholders (leadership, staff, families, students, and the community) can expect to be communicated with, engaged, and supported by the school district. This foundational document provides stakeholders with a roadmap of how systems and strategies will be identified and executed by the school district. These systems and strategies are important because they impact

the chronosystem and exosystem in the student's environment. The impact on the chronosystem supports the need to shift support to account for outcomes for students of color due to the historically inequitable practices of Affirmative Action. Additionally, the exosystem lens supports the need to address situational challenges that exist for students of color as it relates to accessibility to college preparatory courses, curriculum, and course pathways.

It is essential that district administrators are calibrated on the "what" and "how" to support outcomes for all students, but especially students of color. In the MGPS (2020) Strategic Plan, one of the core beliefs states, "We believe that we must intentionally collaborate and use data as a guide to improve our practice." District leadership must be clear on what the outcomes are and how district staff will work together, collaboratively, to get this done. While most administrators interviewed identified calibration as a district strength, administrators, specific to the building level, identified collaboration as an area that needed support in order to create equitable outcomes for students of color. It is recommended that the MGPS leadership team, and other teams looking to engage in a similar area of study, work collaboratively with multiple leadership stakeholders to create collaborative, two-way processes to include building-level voice in the co-creation of systems needed to authentically collaborate about success for students of color. These processes must be published, revisited, and utilized as norms for how collaboration will take place to ensure the goal is met.

Equity and leadership efforts must work in alignment, not separately. Historically, all individual MGPS schools had a site leadership team (SLT) and a separate equity team, often focused on similar goals, but working as two separate teams. The impact of college preparation curriculum has a greater impact on students of color than for White peers (Adelman, 1999).

Therefore, school teams cannot discuss academics and college preparation access without also including the impacts of students of color in the same conversation. As such, all SLT and equity teams within MGPS merged to create a site equity leadership team (SELT) focused on creating goals for the success of all students, especially students of color. These school teams meet bi-monthly to review goals and data and identify actionable next steps to continue to work toward meeting these goals. Most administrators interviewed identified this shift as an important practice that will support current and future work to create more well-defined systems for students of color to equitably access college preparation coursework. The shift of merging together to create a SELT prioritizes the need to make common goals and metrics for student success, especially as it relates to equitable outcomes for students of color. Additionally, it is important that these goals are in alignment with district goals and metrics for success to ensure collaboration and alignment within the school system.

One way to track and measure the access students of color have to college preparation coursework is to review transcript data as it relates directly to course enrollment. The Education Trust (NCES, 2016) reported that in 2016, only 51% of Black and 63% of Latinx high school student transcripts reflected college readiness as compared to White peers at 82%. It is important that students of color graduate high school proportionately to their White peers and have direct access to academically rigorous, college preparation coursework that is racially proportionate to the student population (Banks, 2008). All administrators interviewed were familiar with and have engaged in inquiry cycles of reviewing transcripts of their students as it related to access for students of color. Additionally, some administrators at the high school level identified that they also conduct this practice with their school teams. To make this a district and building wide focus

to support students of color, it is necessary to co-create aligned protocols for secondary schools to use transcripts and data to collect and review data to inform decisions and next steps for building practice.

Racially disaggregated data, and the continuous review of that data, must be included when making all decisions about student success. Students of color graduate both high school and college disproportionately to their White peers as well as enroll in college preparation coursework at significantly lower rates (College Board, 2008; Cooper et al., 2018; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Planty et al., 2007; Reigle-Crumb, 2006; Zeitz & Prathibha, 2005). To support students of color to access college preparation coursework by utilizing multiple disaggregated data points, data sets should include course enrollment by race, graduation rates, and attendance and participation, as well as any other relevant data in relation to this topic. Additionally, to support students of color, accountable, published protocols, aligned to the district strategic plan or mission/goals, must be co-created to ensure that data sets are in all decision-making processes to support the success of students of color. These protocols must include the previously mentioned data sets to support the creation of meaningful goals and must be published, revisited, and utilized to ensure the data goals are met.

To create accountable systems to support students of color, there must be published protocols and metrics in place to measure the success of calibration and collaboration as it relates to supporting students of color to equitably access college preparation coursework. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, creating published norms of how these protocols would work, with co-created cycles to check in on progress using data such as meeting minutes, administrator feedback, and student success outcomes. Organizations must calibrate as a system and work in

collaboration with one another to be focused on common goals. Once teams are aligned, they are then better positioned to utilize data to track their success and areas of growth and hold themselves accountable to shared goals. This includes identifying common goals that are shared between district leadership, building leadership, SELT, and building staff as to how teams will communicate, create goals, conduct cycles of inquiry, create actionable next steps, and review outcomes to inform future decision-making.

Recommendation 3: Create District and School Policies and Procedures to Support Accessible, Culturally Relevant College Preparation Coursework for Students of Color

This section recommends the creation of policies and procedures at both the district and school level that support students of color to access culturally relevant college preparation coursework opportunities. While individual buildings have college preparatory classes and programs available to enroll in, the master schedule was identified as a barrier to true accessibility to all of these college preparation courses and programs. The recommendations for district leaders include supporting the creation of a viable, district-wide master scheduling tool or framework to ensure optimal accessibility to classes. It is recommended that school leaders include students of color in the process of engaging and enrolling students of color in available rigorous courses that will prepare them for college and beyond.

School districts must create policies and procedures to support accessible, culturally relevant college preparation coursework for students of color. In research conducted by Conger et al. (2009), schools serving minority students were less likely to offer AP courses as compared to schools with a predominantly White population. Additionally, enrollment in other college preparation courses, such as honors or college preparatory tracks, were predominantly filled by

White and Asian students than students of color (College Board, 2008; Klopfenstein, 2004b; Planty et al., 2007; Reigle-Crumb, 2006; Zeitz & Prathibha, 2005). As such, Levine and Zimmerman (2010) point out the importance of creating actionable strategies and interventions to support equitable access and enrollment in college preparation coursework and programs. Therefore, school districts must create systems to support accessibility for students of color. In this study, these strategies include the creation of a viable master schedule framework and collaborative processes for supporting curriculum options for students. This work is important because it impacts the exosystem level of the student's environment within the conceptual framework that identifies the need to create accessible, college preparatory pathways for students of color.

Accessibility to courses for students is highly controlled by a school's master schedule. Therefore, the creation of this system must include multiple stakeholders and align to district expectations for student course taking opportunities. All building administrators interviewed identified their school's master schedule as a barrier to providing students of color with equitable access to college preparation coursework opportunities. This is because, despite many college preparation course and pathway opportunities being available to students, the disparity between how schools deliver these opportunities (via their master schedule), results in accessibility issues for students. This issue, identified by building administrators, highlighted variance in practice, such as the number of classes a student could take in one day, the state and district course taking graduation requirements in place, and prerequisites needed to take certain courses (limiting access to all students). The solution, many building administrators identified, is the need for authentic collaboration with district partners to calibrate on district priorities and how to

equitably offer opportunities to students from a district-wide approach. By doing this work, building administrators position themselves to disrupt practices and policies that significantly affect students of color (Means, 2019).

College preparation coursework opportunities must be available to students of color. Within MGPS, there are many college preparation coursework opportunities that are reflected within and significantly impact the master schedule. The first is the guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC). The GVC is the general education curriculum that was written by district teachers for the MGPS student population to include college preparation strategies to build college going skills. Next, all comprehensive high schools within the district offer AP course offerings. This is also the case for AVID classes, with all secondary classes embedding AVID strategies school-wide as well as an AVID elective for students to choose from. Finally, each secondary school has selected either the IB or Cambridge college preparation framework. While these opportunities are in place, they also each must have access points to students of color and allow students of color to engage in their coursework without barrier. While these opportunities are positioned to support all students to access college preparatory courses, there are identified barriers in place which significantly impact the availability to all students, especially students of color.

To create access to college preparation coursework opportunities, college coursework opportunities must also allow students to access courses with minimal barriers. In 2016, the percentage of students enrolled in AP and IB coursework was higher for White and Asian students than students of color (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Schools must be wary of "gatekeeping" courses which prevent students of color from accessing necessary college

preparation coursework at a proportionate rate to the White peers (Flennaugh et al., 2017). While having opportunities is important, flexible pathways and multiple entry points is essential to provide true access to students of color. For AP courses, it is recommended that students, including students of color, work with the SELT directly and are included in both the course selection process and the creation of the prerequisites (if any) needed to enroll in a class.

Administrators must work with students to create processes for engaging and enrolling other students of color in college preparation courses at a rate that is proportionate to the student population. Most administrators interviewed expressed a desire to engage in this work but felt that policies and historical practices prevented this from being achieved. This process will ensure that students have voice in the courses available and are working directly with administrators to co-create systems of support to support enrollment of students of color. Next, the IB/Cambridge/AVID framework courses continue to lack students of color in the stand-alone elective courses. As with processes needed for AP courses, students of color must be intentionally engaged to review these coursework options and provide feedback. This feedback will help administrators to better understand how to support enrollment for students of color and ensure representation and participation and classes. Finally, schools must work collaboratively to create intentionally flexible access points within their master schedules to allow for proportionate course enrollment rates. This process and information must be available and shared with all families, including families of color so they are aware of their accessible options to take college preparatory courses.

Limitations and Delimitations

Within this study there were limitations and delimitations to consider during the scope of the study. Limitations are elements of the study which were not in the control of the researchers and are included in the method, design, and approach of the study (Nenty & Nenty, 2009). In this study, a limitation is the limited amount of high school principals within the district as there are only six high school principals in the district. While this is not necessarily a small number of high school principals to have in a given district, to gather a robust sampling of interviews, there is a limitation to the information that will be gathered directly from building-level administration. This limitation was off-set by including assistant principals and other building administrators who are directly involved in the enrollment process. An additional limitation of the study is the issue of social desirability, as administrators may want to most closely align themselves to practices that may not be fully occurring in their building in a desire to align responses with the perceived socially positive qualities and limiting negative qualities (Preti & Miotto, 2011). The limitations above were overcome by at least four high school principals agreeing to participate in the study. In the interview process, school leaders appeared to trust the process and provided straightforward, honest responses that indicated they trusted the information shared would be kept confidential, as data from one district would not be generalizable.

Delimitations are the elements in a research study over which the researcher has control (Nenty & Nenty, 2009). For this research study, limiting the scope of stakeholder participants was the positionality they held as it related to the research topic at hand. Perspectives and insights, based on the context of a participant's role within the district, will limit their ability to answer questions comprehensively. These delimitations were overcome by asking questions that

related directly to the participant's role to collect information that most closely related to their role within the work of the research topic. Through conducting interviews, this allowed the researcher to obtain additional information from follow-up questions to collect the most pertinent information.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further address this problem of practice, there are recommendations that the researcher would like to make. The first is to conduct research on authentic systems that exist at school districts to create community networks of color to support student learning. This research will attempt to learn how these networks are created and the process that the district used to do so. The research will also aim to collect outcome data of the impacts of these networks to support students of color to college preparation coursework. Next, further research is needed regarding how students, families, and community members of color feel about the efforts to improve access for college preparation coursework accessibility for students of color. Questions to frame this research include "Do students, parents, and community members feel partnerships are strong?" and "Would they agree that efforts in place meet the needs of their student?" Additionally, literature from Sadler (2007) and Dougherty et al. (2005) highlighted that students of color are just as capable of succeeding in college preparation coursework as White peers. As such, further research is needed regarding how schools are measuring student capability to succeed in college preparation courses and how they are using this information to support increased college preparation opportunities for students of color. The research will seek to understand how student capability is measured and how the data is used to inform next steps for student outcomes. Finally, additional research is needed to collect examples of districts and/or school methods to

incorporate all college preparation opportunities for students within a comprehensive master schedule that supports access for students of color. The research will focus on how the master schedule is created, who is represented when the master schedule is created, and how the master schedule allows for multiple entry points for students of color as it relates to accessing college preparation coursework.

Conclusion

Secondary students of color have faced significant inequities as it relates to access to college preparation coursework opportunities in public education. This study explored this accessibility issue and sought to understand how school administrators are working to increase the proportion of students of color in college preparation coursework as well as what challenges they encountered and how they addressed them. Because of the research of how the district was working to increase accessibility, it was found that, according to district and school leaders, the district of study had strong calibration between the district and schools, strong systems to review racially disaggregated data, and there were accessible college course-taking opportunities for students of color. Regarding challenges they encountered, this included collaboration between district and school teams, concerns about master schedule as a barrier to students of color, and meeting individual student needs as it relates to accessibility. In turn, three recommendations for practice were made. The first was to create authentic partnerships with students, families, and community members of color. Next, accountable, multi-tiered systems of calibration and collaboration within the district are needed to support accessible outcomes for students of color. Finally, systems to support accessible, culturally relevant college preparation coursework for

students or color must be in place to encourage and ensure accessible course taking opportunities.

This study is important because it highlights the disparity of outcomes, based on race, for students of color in public education as it relates to equitable access to courses that will prepare them for college. Accessibility to college preparation coursework supports student success in college, and there are a variety of benefits for people obtaining a college degree including improved health and life expectancy, increased earned salary, greater rates of employment, and less likelihood to experience poverty (Chan, 2016). Without change in practice, schools are directly supporting historically harmful outcomes for their student population, specifically students of color. This study seeks to highlight these inequitable practices and provide supportive strategies for districts to employ to interrupt these practices and promote the engagement of students of color and their families in the process.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How are school/district administrators working to increase the proportion or number of students of color in college preparation coursework/programs?
2. What challenges do school/district administrators encounter and how do they address them?

	Potential Probes	**R Q**	**Q Type (Patton)**
Hi, _____. Thank you so much for participating in this interview – I am so thankful for your participation. I will be asking you questions regarding your position with the district and possible impacts/outcomes that might have. There is not a wrong answer and this interview will be completely confidential. If you have any questions before, during, or after, then please be sure to let me know. Before we begin, is there anything I can do to make sure			

you are comfortable or answer any questions you may have? **Interview Question**			
1. Tell me a little bit about your personal background.	Are there any other experiences you'd like to share?		Demographic
1. Tell me a little about your professional background and about your current role in the district.	Are there any other aspects to your role that you'd like to share?		Demographic
1. What college preparation coursework were you enrolled in high school, if any?	How did you feel that coursework prepared you for college? What was the process to enrolling in this coursework? How has your participation or non-participation in college preparation coursework/pathways influenced the way you view these opportunities?		Demographic
1. Describe for me your main responsibilities as it relates to connecting students to district course offerings?	Are there any other responsibilities you'd like to share? How were these responsibilities communicated to you? What resources are available to you to support this responsibility? Probe about college prep offerings.	1	Sensory

1. Describe for me your main responsibilities as it relates to connecting students of color to district course offerings?	Are there any other responsibilities you'd like to share? How were these responsibilities communicated to you? What resources are available to you to support this responsibility? Probe about college prep offerings.	1	Knowledge
1. The percentage of students of color who are enrolled in a college preparation coursework at your school/ is ____/The percentage of students of color who are enrolled in a college preparation coursework in your district is ____. What do you think about the situation? How do you explain the percentage?	What other factors do you think contribute to this percentage(s)? How do you feel about these outcomes?	1	Knowledge - Procedural Demographic, Opinions and Values
1. What is the process in your district and/or school to determine college preparation course selection for all students?	How are you aware of this process? How has this been messaged to you? Why do you believe you are unaware of this information? What factors do you believe contribute to this?	1	Knowledge - Procedural, Opinions and Values
1. SCHOOL: What strategies are in place, if any, at the building or district level to support course selection processes for students of color?	Who is responsible to employ these strategies? How is equitability considered?	1	Knowledge, Opinions and Values

DISTRICT: What strategies are in place, if any, at the district level to support course selection processes for students of color?			
1. What support is offered to families to understand the process and what opportunities to provide feedback are available?	What role or significance do you see families playing in this work?	1	Demographic, Opinions and Values
1. SCHOOL: Which people from your school community serve on your master school committee including the following distinguishers? - Job Title - Stakeholder Position (school staff, parent, community member, student) - Racial Background - Age - Gender (if identified) DISTRICT: Which people from the district community serve on committees that focus on course selection including the following distinguishers? - Job Title - Stakeholder Position (school staff, parent, community member, student) - Racial Background - Age - Gender (if identified)	What kind of community representation do you have on the committee? What recruitment strategies does the committee use to cultivate a diverse group of stakeholders?	2	Demographic, Opinions and Values

1. SCHOOL: Describe for me the process of building a master schedule at your school as it relates to college preparation coursework and programs? DISTRICT: Describe for me the processes you are aware of that schools use to build master schedules as it relates to college preparation coursework and programs?	When does this occur during the year? Who is included? How is this organized/created?	1	
1. SCHOOL: What courses at your school are available for all students to access an advanced, college preparation course or program? DISTRICT: What courses at your district are available for all students to access an advanced, college preparation course or program?	What was the process to develop these options? What factors contribute to having available classes for all students? What factors contribute to not having available classes for all students?	1	Knowledge
1. SCHOOL: How does your school support equitable access for students with being placed in college preparation classes for which they qualify? DISTRICT: How does your district support equitable access for students with being placed in college preparation classes for which they qualify?	How was the program/intervention designed? Who was involved in the creation of the program/intervention designed? What is the process? What factors are considered?	2	Demographic, Opinions and Values
1. SCHOOL: How does your school support equitable access for students of color with being placed in college	What is the process? What factors are considered?	2	Demographic, Opinions and Values

preparation classes for which they qualify? DISTRICT: How does your district support equitable access for students of color with being placed in college preparation classes for which they qualify?			
1.　　What resources are available to increase the proportion of students of color in college preparation classes?	How were these resources allocated to increase the proportion?	2	
1.　　What challenges have you or your team experienced in regards to providing accessibility to advanced coursework for all students?	What are you doing to address the problem (if they have a problem)? Has this positively affected the outcome? If so, why? Has this negatively affected the outcome? If so, why? What do you believe are the root causes to these challenges?	2	Opinions and Values
1.　　How satisfied are you with MGPS's efforts to increase the proportion of students of color who are accessing college preparation coursework?	Is there anything other information you'd like to share?	2	Opinions and Values
1.　　Is there anything else you feel I should know in relation to this area of study as it applies to your current situation?	Is there anything other information you'd like to share?		Opinions and Values