

EXAMINING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY WITHIN ADVANCED PLACEMENT  
PROGRAMS USING THE LENS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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By

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

EXAMINING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY WITHIN ADVANCED PLACEMENT

PROGRAMS USING THE LENS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

presented by Crystal Ward a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education,  
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

As I think about who I wanted to dedicate this dissertation to, the first person would be my mother, Robin Ward. Growing up she instilled in us that education was our way to success. She encouraged me through this process and would have long talks with me when I wanted to quit. If it was not for her, I may not have made it through the process. Secondly, to any person that took the time to give me ideas, reviewed my writing or assisted in any way with this project I am dedicating this to you. Finally, I want to dedicate this to black and brown children, that aspire to be greater than their own expectations, regardless of their circumstance. Trust me; if I can do it, you can too!

.

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## ABSTRACT

Using the social justice lens, this study aimed to provide clarity on the impact of leadership on college readiness in an urban school environment. This researcher investigated what leadership characteristics, accountability practices and what teachers and leaders within an urban school in Chicago are doing to increase college readiness for their minority population. Also, the researcher examined the impact that leadership has on college readiness programs including the Advanced Placement program within the school. While the findings were inconsistent, the tenets of social justice premediated the ethos of this setting and established that equity can occur with vision and fortitude. The implications for practice for all high schools are important.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE**

## **Introduction to Background of the Study**

Throughout the history of America, minority students' achievement has fallen behind their White counterparts. A 2016 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reported, by the twelfth grade, the White-Black achievement gap in reading was 30 points in 2013, increasing only six points since 1992. Similarly, in the fourth grade, the White-Black achievement gap in mathematics went from 32 points in 1990 to 26 points in 2013 (p. 5). While these differences in achievement have continued in the early years of education, those same gaps exist in the post-secondary school setting as well. For example, during 2013, the total college enrollment rate for White 18 to 24 year-olds was 42 percent while the rates for their Black and Hispanic peers remained at 34 percent (p. 5).

As the college readiness gaps widen, minority students who fall behind have fewer chances of excelling at the collegiate level, ultimately affecting a student's access to career and attaining finances to support themselves. Abel and Dietz (2014) further noted the financial benefits of a college education still outweigh the expenses as they emphasized that workers with bachelor's degrees earned 56 percent more than workers with only a high school diploma. Consequently, this study examined how an urban high school with a focus on Advanced Placement (AP) classes is effectively preparing minority students, specifically African American and Hispanic students for post-secondary education so that they successfully attain a college degree.

## Statement of the Problem

Currently, the transition of African-American and Hispanic students to the post-secondary level is lower than Caucasians. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2017), the undergraduate fall enrollment rate for Caucasian students was 50.4% of the overall number of students enrolled. Conversely, African-American student enrollment was 12.4%, and Hispanic students accounted for 17.3% of undergraduate students for the fall of 2017. Similarly, the percentage of 16-24 year-olds considered high school dropouts was the highest among Hispanic students followed by African Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). As a result, students of color across the United States are disproportionately underperforming.

Moreover, urban educators report the growing challenges of educating urban youth who are increasingly experiencing problems such as poverty, limited English proficiency, family instability, and poor health (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Finally, reports on the condition of urban schools denote the perception that urban students struggle in chaotic atmospheres with inadequate funds, teachers, and curricula, and with limited opportunities (National Center for Education Statistic, 2017). One way that schools can provide the collegiate experience at the high school level is through the national Advanced Placement (AP) program sponsored by the College Board. These AP programs provide an opportunity for students to earn college credit while still in high school. However, according to the College Boards (2017), while performance gaps have improved for Hispanic students, African-American students remain underrepresented in AP programs. Conversely, Caucasians make up 56.3% of students enrolled in AP courses. In comparison, Hispanic students make-up 22.4%, and African-American

students make-up 14.4 percentage of students enrolled in AP classes. With the United States projected to become a “Minority White” in the year 2045 (Frey, 2018), schools’ AP courses are not reflective of the demographics of the United States. Therefore, in order for the AP program to aid current Hispanic and African-American students, they first must have equal access as their Caucasian counterparts to AP level courses in secondary schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to highlight the impact of administrators and teachers’ actions within an urban setting on minority students’ access to AP courses and ultimately to college accessibility. The researcher wanted to provide both charter schools and public schools with additional strategies to help their scholars be successful post high school. As illustrated above, students of color across the United States are disproportionately underperforming (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). It is the responsibility of teachers, along with building-level leadership to ensure that all scholars have equal accessibility to attaining post-secondary success. Within this mixed design case study, the researcher collected qualitative data by interviewing members of the administrative team (Creswell, 2012) and quantitative data with a few short answer questions from teachers through an online survey. In addition, the researcher did observations and reviewed documents to determine the impact of social justice leadership on the outcomes of this urban high school setting (Creswell, 2004). As a result, the researcher created three research questions to guide this mixed design inquiry.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What social justice leadership characteristics are principals practicing in an urban school with high minority student populations enrolled in Advanced Placement programs?
2. What strategies and instructional practices are teachers using in an urban school with high minority student populations enrolled in Advanced Placement programs?
3. What accountability structures for teachers and principals are in place that creates a college readiness environment?

## **Conceptual/ Theoretical/Framework**

Northouse (2016) emphasized leadership as a practice of influencing people in their behavior and growth towards established schools' goals. This process of influence serves as a direct link between the success of minority students learning and the school leadership. Using leadership as a theoretical framework, the researcher examined three theories, including servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), transformational leadership (Burns, 2003), and social justice leadership (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). In the following sections, the conceptual framework will emerge through analysis of each of these theories.

### **Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership is a combination of two words, "servant" and "leader" (Spears, 1996). In examining the servant leader theory, a servant leader is someone who uses both

service and influence on followers, placing them first (Northouse, 2016). Similarly, servant leaders have a social responsibility to support those less fortunate (Northouse, 2016). “Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, building a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making (Spears, 1998, p. 4).

Spears (1996) developed a list of ten characteristics of a servant leader. Those characteristics included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community (Spears, 1996). In a study of mentors and teachers, Ebbrecht and Martin (2017) stated “servant leader mentors enabled these quality teacher participants to grow and achieve great success in their professional lives” (p. 364). Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) discovered in their inquiry, “the school leader who models servant leadership is perceived by teachers to seek inventive ways to improve the school setting” (p. 413). However, this theory has received criticism because the theory implies that to be a good leader you must put others first which conflicts with other leadership characteristics such as directing and concern for production (Northouse, 2016). While servant leadership theory has value when examining schools, this theory did not align with the purpose of this inquiry because it does not specifically focus on the marginalization of minority groups.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Northouse (2016) revealed transformational leader theory is “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (p.186). Yukl (2006) argued a



drawback to transformational leaders is that they have a sense of heroic leadership. However, like the servant leader, the transformational leader involves a high level of influence over its followers (Burns, 2003; Northouse, 2016). The transformational leader inspires visions that challenge others to transcend the status quo to do something for others (Northouse, 2016). Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership can take a person beyond self-interest. Four components guided this theory: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. The followers' self-awareness, maturity, self-actualization, and concern for the well-being of others increases while under transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Idealized influence is realized when “the leader envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, sets an example to be followed, sets high standards of performance, and shows determination and confidence” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). In other words, the leader is influential through ideals. The ideals and the leader inspire followers to go beyond themselves and dedicate themselves to a movement or mission. One example of this is choosing to join the military to serve one's country (Bass, 1999). In education, an example of this is teachers who stay after school to help struggling students because these teachers believe in their mission of educating the youth for a better future, and are influenced by seeing their principals staying after school to work on the same mission.

The inspirational motivation was created and separated from charismatic leadership because it is believed that one can still be inspiring “through the use of simple words, slogans, symbols, and metaphors” without necessarily being charismatic (Bass,

1999, p. 214). Identifying with charisma in a leader is not necessary to understand the importance of a mission. Regardless, leaders can instill confidence and motivate their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993) by articulating and communicating a clear vision and detailing a clear plan. Similarly, leaders need to use words to convey a message of power and a sense of authority (Bass, 1999). An example of this is a principal using a speech to inspire teachers to get through the testing season.

Another component of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation, is displayed when “the leader helps followers to become more innovative and creative” (Iyigun, 2019, p. 281). Leaders need to involve their followers in the decision-making process allowing followers to get creative and innovative in identifying solutions to problems. During the process, the leader gathers ideas from followers without criticizing their followers’ efforts. Instead, the leader helps them think through the problem and their ideas by steering them in the right direction through conversation and framing the problems (Bass & Avolio, 1993). An example of this in education is a principal holding a meeting with teachers to discuss failing test scores and ways to combat those failing test scores.

Individualized consideration is when “leaders pay attention to the developmental needs of followers and support and coach the development of their followers” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). On a basic level, it is the leader treating their followers as individuals instead of treating them as a collective. Knowing one’s followers allows a person to develop better opportunities for the follower to self-actualize and reach higher levels professionally and intellectually (Yukl, 2006). An example of this in education is a principal meeting with teachers to understand the problems and experience they have in a

classroom and suggesting or implementing solutions to help them with problems. Furthermore, transformational leadership theory initiates leaders to inspire and motivate followers to achieve organizational goals (Bush, 2003; Yukl, 2006), thus providing less attention to the needs of the individual (Stone et al., 2004). This lack of focus on individual needs revealed a misalignment between the purposes of this inquiry and the theory, resulting in transformational leadership theory not considered for the conceptual framework.

### **Social Justice Leadership**

The third theory that the researcher examined was the social justice leadership theory (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). The term social justice leadership is a relatively new term in the field of educational administration (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). Nevertheless, the focus of a social justice leader is disrupting arrangements that promote the marginalization and exclusion of groups (Theoharis, 2007). Furthermore, the social justice leader inspires change, ethics, and justice in their followers (Theoharis, 2007). Similarly, Bredeson (2004) and Jean-Marie (2008) found a common thread of social justice leadership included creating equitable schooling and education (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). One definition of social justice leadership “makes issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). This definition focuses on finding and eliminating marginalization in schools. Therefore, social justice leadership must include empathy, respect, recognition, and care. It focuses on the belief that all humans deserve equality, fairness, equity in personal dimensions including social, education, and

economics (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). Social justice leaders find problems that interfere with achieving equity and attempt to address such issues with long-term strategies (Theoharis, 2007). In schools where social justice is not embedded in the culture, responding to injustice is piecemeal and reactive (Miller & Martin, 2015).

Inequality in schools has the potential to affect all students in various ways. Examples include a decrease in solidarity and motivation and an increase in discipline problems, both of which can further cause the effectiveness and efficiency in school to decrease (Chiu, 2010). Principals and school administration should commit themselves to the students' academics and their emotional success (Theoharis, 2007). However, it is essential for social justice leaders to not only focus on what is best for the student, but also with what is best for society (Miller & Martin, 2015). To ensure this, social justice leadership should not only focus on what is happening in the classroom but also should examine school and district operations. Examination should focus on inclusion, understanding of an empathetic school climate, and student achievements (Chiu, 2010).

Education's complex social context and the open system create an environment that requires educational leaders to be proactive and aware as they navigate in their schools' communities (Adams & Copeland, 2005). For social justice leadership to find success in schools it is crucial that implemented are adopted policies in order to help surrounding communities. To ensure success, educational leaders must form coalitions and involve themselves in politics (Black & Murtadha, 2007). Specifically within this inquiry, leadership for social justice theory was used to bring into focus the idea of creating a high school ethos that has a strong emphasis on social justice as a set of beliefs, emphasizing equity, ethical values, justice, care and respect (Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

While servant leadership and transformational leadership could both be beneficial to an urban school environment, for this study, the researcher determined that social justice leadership was the best lens to utilize as social justice leadership focuses on the marginalization of groups of people (Miller & Martin, 2015). Social justice leadership is therefore used as the conceptual framework because this theory frames equitable practices.

### **Design of the Study**

The design paradigm used to guide this inquiry was pragmatism as a worldview. Creswell (2014) argued that pragmatism “arises out of actions, situations, and consequences” (p. 10). Because pragmatism emphasizes the use of many perspectives (Creswell), the methodology selected was a mixed-method research design. This design provided an enhanced understanding of the problem of underrepresented minorities in Advanced Placement (AP) programs by using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred concurrently, consistent with the principles of the mixed-method design. Additionally, using mixed methods assisted the researcher in triangulating the data (Creswell). Similarly to the beliefs of Creswell (2014), the researcher wanted to concurrently analyze both the qualitative and quantitative data sets to provide clarification of what leadership and teaching behaviors were occurring in this setting that contributed to minority student success in AP programs.

Likewise, using a case study approach, the researcher researched one high school from the Noble Network of Schools in Chicago, Illinois. The use of a qualitative case study approach provided opportunity for in-depth responses and richer feedback (Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, as Creswell (2014) explained, “We want to empower

individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between the researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 42). To this end, the researcher chose one case study using a mixed design approach.

### **Setting**

The high school selected for this study, Anywhere High School is a Title I public charter school in the Midwest and is part of a top performing district. Any student living within the public-school district can apply to enroll. Anywhere High School serves 90.4% of low-income students, with 98.6 percent of the student body being African-American or Hispanic (Chicago Public Schools, 2018). According to the school principal, Anywhere High School has seventy-six staff members that include teachers, paras, and administration with staff experience varying. For example, last school year, there were 18 new staff members; 24 staff members with two to three years’ experience; 23 staff members four to five years’ experience; six staff members with more than five years’ experience. The ethnicity of the staff is 4.1% Asian, 13.7% African-America, 58.9% Caucasian, and 23.3% Hispanic. Thus, the ethnicity of the staff is not representative of the student population; however, it is representative of the majority of urban high schools (Frey, 2018).

Regarding the gender composition of the staff, it is unlike most schools in America. According to Data USA (2020), traditionally in secondary schools’ women make up 58.4% of the occupation. However, at Anywhere High School, there is a higher male to female ratio. Currently, the school has a 60% male and 40% female staff ratio of staff.

Throughout the school year, Anywhere High School allows its teachers to participate in various leadership opportunities. The school administration aims to cultivate leaders from within with staff having opportunities to assume responsibility as leaders in a variety of ways, such as data and curriculum teams which are teams that examine data and student growth vertically as well as horizontally. In addition, the role of the summer school principal is a leadership opportunity for staff, as well as serving on leadership panels (Anywhere High School, 2020).

There are certain aspects of Anywhere High School that demonstrate the cultural and symbolic values within the setting. For example, the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program along with school athletics both play significant parts in the educational experience. To further foster a college atmosphere, Anywhere High School has a stairwell that focuses on colleges and careers. Displayed in this hallway are scholars' academic achievements and future aspiring majors. The school also participates in an annual College Signing Day activity, equally as important as an athletic signing. Anywhere High School focuses on college preparation throughout scholars' secondary school careers with sophomore and junior classes annually taking college campus visits. One hundred percent of their students participate in a weeklong pre-college program hosted by partners from all across the country (Anywhere High School, 2020). The school's partnership assists in the funding of these summer experiences. The school district also contributes to ensuring scholars value their achievements with the district's annual Senior Sendoff, recognizing seniors for their scholarly endeavors. Finally, according to the principal, instructional time has the highest

value placement within the school with administration and teachers prioritizing maintaining scholar's presence in the classrooms and limiting outside distractions.

### **Participants**

The emphasis of this investigation was to gain understanding of what an urban high school was doing to enhance the accessibility of students of color to AP and ultimately to higher education; thus, a purposeful sampling method was the most appropriate approach for selecting research participants (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling provided a means to answer the three research questions posed for the study by targeting participants that could provide the best data (Creswell, 2014). Initial selection of the participant group began with a review of the Noble Network school membership. Noble Network is a network of public charter middle schools and high schools servicing Chicago, Illinois. The Noble Network founded in 1999 consists of 18 schools (Noble Network, 2019). Using the high school membership of Noble Network (n=18), the high school that demonstrated the most consistent leadership and highest levels of student achievement was selected as the case study for the investigation, Anywhere High School. From that setting both the qualitative data and the quantitative data were collected.

Data were collected from interviews with key administrators, department leads and alumni (n=10), including the school principal, deans, athletic coordinators, and the chief building engineer. The identification of these administrators was purposeful, as they were involved with students on a daily basis (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the majority of the administrators had been part of the school for over two years.

The focus of the interviews was to understand the internal and external accountability structures within the school. Additional attention was given to the



perceptions of school leaders regarding their understanding and practice of social justice leadership, and how they established the focus and strategies used to allow all students accessibility to AP.

Due to the school's stance on protecting teacher time, the researcher did not conduct small focus groups with the classroom teachers. Instead, a Likert designed survey that also included open-ended questions for additional comments was sent via email (Krueger & Kasey, 2009) to all full-time educator within the school (N=47). The survey had a return rate of 75%.

### **Data Collection**

Because the researcher chose to use the mixed-method approach, multiple levels of data were examined utilizing the concurrent embedded model (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the researcher collected data concurrently. Administered along with school administration, department leads and school alumni interviews (N=10) were teacher surveys (N=47) to provide insight into the perspectives of what practices were occurring within the school. By using a mixed-methods approach, the researcher was able to analyze the results from administrators interviewed and triangulate with the perspectives of the surveyed teachers, along with the analyzed school documents and observations (Creswell, 2014).

Before the start of the investigation, the researcher collected permission from the school district gatekeeper (see Appendix A) to conduct and collect research in Anywhere High School. After securing gatekeeper permission and after the proposal hearing, the researcher submitted the formal University Institutional Review Board application. Upon receiving approval from the University of Missouri (see Appendix B), the researcher

contacted potential participants to request their participation in the study and followed up by collecting letters of informed consent (see Appendix C). For the purposes of this mixed design case study, interviews, rich descriptive field notes, documentary analysis, and observations by the researcher, established data to confirm triangulation and reinforced the reliability and validity of findings.

### **Teacher Survey Protocol**

The researcher administered an online survey to staff to investigate how social justice leadership within Anywhere High School impacted the college-going culture. Included in the survey were inquiries regarding the teachers' perceptions of the accountability structures in place, along with their teaching strategies or behaviors that created a college-going environment. Before the administration of the survey, notification by the administration that a survey would be forthcoming occurred, and teachers had a week turnaround deadline to help increase the response rate.

Consequently, the teachers received the survey via email, allowing for anonymous responses. The survey (Appendix D) was composed of 20 questions and asked participants to provide feedback on their thoughts around social justice leadership characteristics, teacher behaviors, accountability structures, and access to higher-level courses. The majority of the questions in the survey were closed-ended questions via a Likert scale as Fink (2013) stated closed-ended questions create ease when scoring and analyzing the data. However, after each question teachers could provide additional information about their responses or give examples. A 4-point Likert scale instead of the

traditional 5-point scale was chosen as a way of ensuring participants chose an answer and avoided giving a neutral response (Fink, 2013).

Before the distribution of the survey, the researcher administered a test-retest pilot on the survey instrument with other educators not included in the sample for reliability. This ensured that the survey would provide the needed information and checked for consistency of the information obtained (Fink, 2013). The piloted survey was administered two times to the same group of fifteen educators within four weeks. The scored sets from the survey administration were correlated using a Pearson coefficient ( $r$ ) to establish the stability for the reliability. Reliability analysis revealed a .69 Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This coefficient was within the acceptable range (Fink, 2017). The survey given to teachers focused on questions around social justice, accountability, and accessibility to advanced placement courses. To ensure content validity, the researcher prepared the survey questions grounded in social justice and other identified topics (Merriam, 2009), and during the test-retest process, individuals were asked to note any questions that were unclear; ultimately, three questions were modified accordingly. This helped to establish face validity (Merriam, 2009).

### **Principal Interview Protocol**

In addition to the quantitative data collected from the teachers, the researcher wanted to capture an in-depth look at the beliefs on leadership's impact on enrollment in higher-level courses from the perspective of school leadership, within Anywhere High School. As an effort to ensure the voices of each participant was heard, the researcher conducted individual interviews for sixty minutes instead of a small focus group (Krueger & Kasey, 2009). Furthermore, in an effort to gain additional insight, the researcher

developed semi-structured open-ended questions for the interview (Appendix D). Thus, allowing for more in-depth feedback (Merriam, 2009). The researcher developed a fifteen-question interview format for the school administrators. A peer examination of interview questions before distribution to participants helped to ensure face validity (Merriam, 2009). The peer examination of questions was sent to ten colleagues that were well versed in the topic of social justice and AP courses to ensure content validity (Fink, 2013). Participants provided feedback if they did not understand or if the questions needed modification. Feedback from the peer examiners allowed the researcher to adjust any questions that presented confusion, therefore, creating additional validity for the instrument (Fink, 2013).

The researcher allowed participants to choose the location of the interview (i.e., classroom, office, or an additional space within their current school), thus creating a natural setting conducive for gathering optimal data (Creswell, 2014). Due to the current state of the Covid-19 virus, interviews also could be conducted via an online platform.

Lastly, member checking was utilized to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and to confirm that each participant's story was portrayed as intended (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Provided were instructions to the participants to contact the researcher to make necessary corrections and changes accordingly. Additionally, the researcher took field notes during the interview process to record information not reflected on the audiotapes.

### **Document Collection**

During this study, this researcher requested various school documents and records. Examples of documentation included three years of school data around demographics, AP enrollment and qualifying scores, the student handbook, course

selection, attendance records, etc. Following the suggestions of Creswell (2009), the researcher first sorted the documents and read the data to gain a general sense of the information and its meaning. The researcher then examined the number of students enrolled in higher-level courses versus the number of students enrolled within the school. In addition, the researcher analyzed the school's course outline and handbook using the researchers' document template to enhance analysis (Appendix D).

### **Observations**

Observations (Appendix D) provided descriptions of the occurrences of preparing minority students to succeed in AP courses and access higher education in relation to cultural responsiveness, education equity, and social justice. However, due to COVID 19 only one observation of a faculty meeting was completed. That observation provided detailed evidence as to how interactions between the principal and the students and teachers promoted cultural responsiveness, education equity, and social justice. The observation categories included settings, interactions, activities, language, nonverbal communication, and the researcher's own thoughts. Analyzed in concurrence with the themes developed from the coding of the transcripts of the interviews were the observation.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon completion of the data collection, the researcher performed a data analysis on both the quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2004). Data analysis was performed through the lens of social justice leadership characteristics, issues of accountability, and strategies that teachers were utilizing to create AP success.

## **Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed using data collected from the teacher's survey. The quantitative data was collected through administering the survey to teachers and entering the results into the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were used and reported. The frequency and percentages were calculated for all nominal data on the demographic survey gender, race/ethnicity, and educational level. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated for the interval data to further understand the perceptions of the teachers regarding the social justice characteristics being used by their principals and what behaviors they were using to enhance equity within the school setting.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

Data from the interviews was used to triangulate and enrich the data obtained from the teacher survey and to answer the research questions. Qualitative data derived from interviews with school administration from Anywhere High School (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009) were transcribed to assist in the process of making sense of the data. Interview transcripts were read in their entirety to obtain an overview of the participants' perceptions. The transcripts were then coded for categories related to the perceived social justice characteristics demonstrated by the principals, teacher behaviors, and the accountability structures in place. Also included in the qualitative data analysis were the written comments from the survey participants. The data gradually evolved into patterns that allowed the researcher to analyze the information in each category (Creswell, 2014), resulting in themes. To corroborate the findings member checking and triangulation of data occurred (Creswell, 2014). Finally, integration of the data from both

the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study provided a deeper understanding of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

Anywhere High School is a charter school within the Noble Network schools in Chicago, Illinois Noble Network is known for being a charter network with high standards of expectations for academics, behavior, their students' futures and dedication to educational equity (Noble Network, 2018). According to the network's website, the Noble Network believes in "sweating the small stuff" as a way of pushing students to meet their full potential. Therefore, some of results of the study are a direct result of the nature of the network's expectations. The general college acceptance rate for the network is 98% (Noble Network, 2018). However, while the network as a whole has a history of success, Anywhere High School is one of the newer schools within the network and is often seeking ways to grow and expand. According to the *Chicagozz Magazine* (2018), known for having high standards and listed as one of the top-performing networks of schools within Chicago is the Noble Network. However, not all public schools will have accessibility to the Networks' resources. Additionally, Anywhere High School is in the heart of Chicago, Illinois, where many schools are underperforming.

Another limitation of this research is that the researcher used one school for the entire case study. Using only one school for the research created potential limitations such as generalization that would be avoided if other types of research were conducted. Correspondingly, the researcher had to determine how much to formalize generalization and how much to let readers generalize (Reis, 2006). Similarly, the researcher for this

study was new to the process and had to rely on limited experiences and abilities throughout most of the research.

Another limitation for the study was the use of an online survey. Fink (2017) delineated concerns with online surveys, which include the use of multiple email addresses, not knowing who completed the survey and issues with technology and privacy concerns.

### **Design Controls**

The researcher utilized numerous design controls to reduce bias in the research conducted. To control for limitations of the case study, the researcher addressed biases by focusing on participants' responses while placing personal knowledge aside (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Subsequently, interview questions, along with survey questions were designed using an open-ended question format to generate genuine feedback (Krueger & Casey, 2009). To control for the survey limitation, the Noble Network only allowed one teacher per email access to ensure multiple users from one individual email would not corrupt the data.

To reduce other potential limitations, the researcher triangulated data from a variety of sources, including spending time conducting a school observation and reviewing various documents, including the school handbook, mission, and vision statement, and teacher evaluation processes. Furthermore, the researcher used the mixed-method approach to reduce bias from the qualitative and quantitative portions of the



study (Creswell, 2004). Lastly, the researcher was able to control for various limitations by emerging into the process via face-to-face interactions and observations.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Defined to provide a deeper understanding of the key constructs to enhance the readers' knowledge about the investigation were the following terms:

**Accountability Structures** - According to Strive Together (2017, p. 4), accountability structures is the organizational framework that depicts the different groups within the partnership and includes an outline of the roles and responsibilities of each group, describing the processes, people, and supports necessary to function effectively.

**Advanced Placement Program** - According to the College Board's website (2020), the Advanced Placement program has college level courses that you take in high school. The program offers students challenging coursework and with a successful score on a final exam, students may earn college credit.

**College Readiness Environment** - According to the National Conference of State Legislators (2015), 33 states and the District of Columbia adopted a statewide definition of college and career readiness. While states may change the wording to fit their needs, the adopted state definitions share five standard components: students have specific academic knowledge, can think critically and solve problems, have communication and collaboration skills, and exhibit grit and resilience.

**Minority Student** - United States Legal (2019) provides that a minority is "a student who is an Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Black (African-American), Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander."

**Noble Network** – A network of public charter middle schools and high schools serving in Chicago, Illinois. Found in 1999, was the Noble Network consisting of 18 schools (Noble Network, 2019).

**Social Justice** - Refers to the condition in which all children, regardless of their racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other marginalizing factors are treated with care, respect, and dignity, and experience an educational program that ensures they acquire and maintain academic achievement. Social justice specifically links social justice with academic achievement, critical consciousness, and inclusive practices (Grant & Sleeter, 2007).

**Urban School** - The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has created four locale categories to define schools. These categories include city, suburb, town, and rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Urban schools fall under the city category.

### **Significance of the Study**

While many educational professionals have taken time to discover the lack of equality in educational systems to level the playing field (Harper, 2008), more discovery needs to occur. This research allowed schools to reexamine their current leadership and procedures concerning minority students' access to higher-level courses during their high school career. In addition, this research examined what successful urban school personnel do to create a college-going atmosphere. This research aimed to provide insight for high schools seeking guidance on best practices for leadership that will impact Advanced Placement enrollment and success. Harper (2008) explained education could

be a leading cause of what empowers a student to surpass their socioeconomic status. Therefore, this research helped shed light on how schools can help students succeed.

### **Scholarship**

Previous scholarship on the lack of minority achievement has focused on teacher strategies and on principals' leadership style. While studies have focused on student academic preparedness and faculty interactions, little has focused specifically on a social justice framework for increasing accessibility of minority students to AP courses. Adding to the research on accessibility of minority students into Advanced Placement and the concept of equality for minority students' accessibility to college attainment can influence policy institutionally at local, state and national levels.

### **Practice**

This research study can have implications for the principal and teachers regarding understanding and applying the tenets of social justice within classrooms. The research can provide guidelines for creating interventions for students based on best practice and in support of minority students' accessibility to higher education, which in turn can affect policy.

Schools that utilize the findings from this study will find resources that will help them to develop strategic plans for minority student success. In addition, this research may provide details on how to create a comprehensive college-going environment. Furthermore, as Abel and Deitz (2014) explained, a college degree could provide a myriad of opportunities for advancement. Relying on the accuracy of research from Harper (2008) and Abel and Deitz (2014) along with current research findings, it should be educators' responsibility to ensure that every student and especially the minority

student has the access and proper preparation to achieve all post-secondary goals, including attending college.

### **Summary**

The current state of minority student success within urban environments is lagging behind those of their counterparts. Research shows that school leaders can significantly affect a school's success or failures. To that point, examining practices of schools within the urban core, that serve high numbers of African-American, Latino students and are closing the achievement gap and getting students to prepare for life after high school is important for replication.

Knowing that some students are falling behind with the current state of education, the need to examine the impacts of leadership on college readiness is critical. This mixed-method study (Creswell, 2016) using the social justice leadership lens (Bull, 2015; Furman, 2012; Kathleen, 2004) analyzed administrators and teachers perceptions, reviewed documents and conducted observations on one school within the urban core of Chicago, Illinois. The focus of this study was to examine the school administration's leadership and teachers' perceptions to discover what educators are doing to create success and examine accountability measures used to develop a college accessible environment resulting in high AP placements.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY**

## **Introduction**

For years minority students in the urban core have fallen behind their Caucasian counterparts in the field of education (Margolis, 2018; Musu-Gillette, Robinson, & McFarland, 2016). Some researchers contribute the failure to various injustices that occur in schools within the urban core including, lack of resources, proper preparation of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, low expectations, etc. (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Margolis, 2018) Similarly, others (Kafele, 2013; Scheurcich, 2013) argued students in the urban core lack opportunity and leadership allowing them to excel to the next level. Furthermore, Scheurcich (2013) and Kafele (2013) highlighted strategies such as high expectations, collaborative classrooms, equity audits, and school leadership as contributing factors to student success regardless of their race, gender, or social-economic status. This study examined what an urban charter school in the heart of Chicago is doing to prepare their students for college, thus providing them with new opportunities to change their socioeconomic status. Presented within this section is the history of the organization, along with the analysis of the organization and leadership within the organization.

## **History of the Organization**

In August 1999, Noble Street Charter High School welcomed its very first class of 126 students. To date, the network has expanded to seventeen high schools, and one middle school with over 12,500 current students and 12,5000 alumni (Milkie, 2018). Based in Chicago, Illinois is the Noble Network. Students from all seventy-seven neighborhoods served by Chicago Public Schools can attend the network. Considered a public charter school is the Noble Network, and as a result, the network comprises more

than 10% of the public high school within the city of Chicago (Milkie, 2018). The Noble Network proudly also serves Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival, also known as DACA. In addition, the Noble Network has 55% of its staff identified as people of color (Milkie, 2018)

One of the newest schools to the Noble Network is Anywhere High School. The school opened in 2014 with 300 students in the City of Chicago (Anywhere High School, 2018). The school's focus is to prepare students to graduate from college with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) degrees. In addition to the school's college prep culture, students that are seniors can participate in a STEM internship with a Fortune 500 company. Currently, Anywhere High School has a total of 1061 students, 47 teachers, nine paraprofessionals, and 13 administrators. At the school, administrators range in roles from the school principal, deans, athletic coordinators, and chief building engineer. In addition, the school has a 90% free and reduced lunch rate and high numbers of minorities. In 2018, the school's student population racial demographics breakdown was 86% Latino/Hispanic, 13% African-American, 1% Caucasian, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander (Anywhere High School, 2018).

### **Organizational Analysis**

In their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Lee Bolman and Deal (2007) outlined four-frames to use in the analysis of an organization. They argued that leaders should use these four frames to approach organizational issues. The four frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2007), and each will be discussed as viewed within Anywhere High School. It is crucial

to understand how educational leaders can use the four frames to help improve issues in school.

While producing a culture of college readiness within a school, it is essential to speak to the structural environment frame that Bolman and Deal (2013) defined. The structural frame focuses mainly on “the how” of doing organizational tasks. Such tasks are based on the goals and strategies established early on by the organization and they have the potential to change based on reporting lines, metrics, and deadlines. In the structural frame, an educational leader will create systems and procedures to achieve a goal or fix an issue (Bolman & Deal, 2007). For example, if a school is suffering from low-test scores, school administrators will set a goal to increase test scores next year. To do so, they will create a plan that involves teachers, students, and parents. The plan may include after school tutoring and incentives to encourage students and teachers to achieve the goal (Bolman & Deal, 2007).

Next, the human resource frame places its focus on the employees. The goal is to empower employees to perform their job well. Providing opportunities while addressing their needs is how this is accomplished. These needs can include job satisfaction, human interaction while at the workplace, and personal growth (Bolman & Deal, 2007). The same example used to discuss the structural frame can also apply to the Human Resource frame. If a school is suffering from low-test scores, the school administration may look for ways to encourage or incentivize teachers to improve. For example, providing workshops to help with teaching skills or rewarding bonuses for hitting test score goals.

The political frame focuses on the political aspects of organizations. Many times, when leaders are attempting to make changes, they must concern themselves with



individuals' needs and interest groups' needs. Sometimes these individuals' and interest groups' needs conflict with the leader's initiative. Limited budgets can also have a negative effect on initiatives and needed changes (Bolman & Deal, 2007). It is essential that during this time, leaders find ways to bring people together to ensure the meeting of goals. Using the previous example, if test scores are low and one of the strategies includes after school tutoring, many teachers and parents may not find it beneficial since it requires a sacrifice of time and taking on extra responsibilities. An educational leader may combat this by building coalitions to host meetings to explain why the specific strategy was used and why it is important or meeting with teachers to find out what they can do to make the change beneficial (Bolman & Deal, 2007).

The symbolic frame helps people to find their purpose and meaning in their work. The organization inspires its workers by ensuring their mission is distinctive and significant. It then finds a way to make sure their employees feel involved and a part of solving that mission. To keep employees motivated, an organization hosts celebrations and gives awards to show the progress (Bolman & Deal, 2007). An example of this in education is explaining to teachers how schools help the next generation to succeed and how test scores are indicative of that success, while celebrating their successes.

When a leader is attempting to make changes or improvements, they need to see the issues through these four frames and determine which one(s) will help them to succeed in implementing those changes and improvements. In the beginning, it might be wise for the leader to choose one frame and then switch to another later during the process. The leader also has the option to combine and use two or more of the frames at once to help accomplish goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

“The structural framework details that the structure is the blueprint of the pattern of expectations and exchanges among internal players (executives, managers, employees) and external constituencies (such as customers and clients)” (Bolman & Deal, 2013 p. 38). Similarly, the manager designs and implements a process structure appropriate to the problem and the circumstance, including clarifying organizational goals, clarifying lines of authority, focusing on a task, facts, and logic instead of personality and emotions (Bolman & Deal, 2013). At Anywhere High School, the school structure aligns with this frame. The Noble Network is the overarching organization; however, the network utilizes a decentralized approach. Each campus has a principal and administrative team that creates expectations for the school and its internal players. Those expectations ultimately affect the school’s external players: the students and parents. Bolman and Deal (2013) stated this approach is useful when goals and information are clear, when cause-effect relations are understood, when technologies are reliable, and there is little conflict, low ambiguity, low uncertainty, and stable, legitimate authority.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) symbolic framework centers around the leader’s vision and inspiration as critical because people need something to believe. People will give loyalty to an organization that has a unique identity and makes them feel that what they do is essential. Likewise, symbolism is vital, as is ceremony and ritual to communicate a sense of organizational mission (Bolman & Deal). These leaders tend to be very visible and energetic and manage by walking around. Often these leaders rely heavily on organizational traditions and values as a base for building a shared vision and culture that provides cohesiveness and meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Anywhere High School has developed symbols and created shared values that have led to student success.

## Leadership Analysis

Within schools, there are various types of leaders. One leader that can help to create an environment of change is a transformational leader. A transformational leader raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the followers (Northouse, 2013). Another leadership style is that of the social justice leader who requires a collaborative environment in which to flourish (Capper & Young, 2014). In addition, social justice leadership requires an understanding of inclusion and integration that is central for all policies and practices aimed at eliminating educational inequities (Capper & Young, 2014), which is the focus of Anywhere High School.

As Kafele (2013) stated, one cannot change an achievement gap until you change the attitude gap. The Noble Network and Anywhere High School both work to improve the attitude gap of its staff, students, and stakeholders. The leadership team makes it clear that although students are in the urban core, they have high expectations, and students will have the opportunity to further their education (Noble Network, 2018). Similarly, while leaders might face tough decisions; nevertheless, a leader must remove their biased opinions and make ethical decisions (Banaji, 2003), to achieve the goals of the organization.

The mission of Anywhere High School's is to prepare historically underrepresented groups for the rigor of college and expose them to all the career possibilities in the fields of science technology engineering and math (Anywhere High School, 2018). Similar to Anywhere High School's expectations for underrepresented students, the leadership of the Noble Network also believes in high expectations for the students they serve. The networks' mission states "Noble is a catalyst for educational

equity in Chicago that empowers students with the scholarship, discipline, and honor necessary to succeed in college and lead exemplary lives” (Noble Network, 2018).

The Noble Network utilizes a decentralized approach to leadership, allowing each school the autonomy to create their strategies for success. This guidance usually comes from the head principal. However, although schools have a decentralized approach, data are reviewed with district leadership so that schools know where their schools rank concerning other campuses within the network (Anywhere High School, 2020).

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

In light of the study, the researcher hoped to find best practices for the use of collaboration. The researcher hoped to gain insight into positive scholar experience that present positive student outcomes (Capper & Young, 2014). Consequently, the researcher believed educators and leaders would find other ways to support scholars outside of tracking, which minimizes students and creates separate programs. This inherently hurts subpopulations of students (Capper and Young).

To close the achievement gap, Capper and Young (2014) suggested educators who care about social justice need to develop policies and procedures that are in the center of their focus. Leadership for social justice should distribute access throughout the school setting. Similarly, research supports that moving social justice practices to the center focus requires a leader to challenge inequities (Capper & Young, 2014; Theoharris, 2009). In conducting this research, the hope was that more schools make issues of race, gender, social-economic status, and other marginalization conditions a center part of their work and activism (Theoharis, 2007).

## **Summary**

This section has focused on the development of the Noble Network which started in 1999 (Milkie,2018) and has continued to expand. One of the most recent explanations has been the creation of Anywhere High School which opened in 2014 (Milkie, 2018.) Furthermore, reviewed were four of Bolman and Deal's (2007) organizational frameworks: human resource, structural, political and symbolic. Within the organization there are different types of leaders including the transformative and social justice leaders. Lastly, the researcher discusses potential implications of the study.

**CHAPTER THREE:**

**SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY**

## Introduction

Behrman (2014) highlighted education should create individuals who are wise and tolerant, with integrity who are public-spirited. Furthermore, Behrman argued national interests and pillars of development result from knowledge, as it is promoting spiritual, moral, and ethical values in the society. Accordingly, educators must insist on using education as an instrument to empower young people and drive their potentials to the last level of excellence (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

As Bok (2015) noted, America leads other nations in the world when it comes to offering quality and equally relevant education. To that end, *The College Board*, a nonprofit-based American educational institution located in New York City was created with the primary mandate to connect students to achieve and gain college access and opportunities that come from education (collegeboard.org). Every year this organization assists more than 7 million high school students in moving from secondary education to college by creating programs for college readiness. Some of the programs designed by the College Board include Scholastic Achievement Tests (SAT) and AP. Furthermore, the board must administer and create a standardized core curriculum and tests to post-secondary education institutions to boost college readiness as part of the college admission process (College Board, 2014). AP is one such initiative of the College Board mandated with provisions of academic solutions to students.

The Advanced Placement initiative offers programs at the college level at various high schools throughout the nation (College Board, 2014). Specifically, the Advanced Placement (AP) is a program that embraces discussions, problem-solving in teams, and promotes reading and writing. It offers high school students, examinations, and college-

level programs (College Board, 2014). Additionally, American universities and colleges may offer course credit and give placement to students who excel in the courses (Skubikowski, Wright, & Graf, 2009). The College Board has a panel of experts, and college-level educators in each field tasked to come up with an AP curriculum for each of the various subjects (Kyburg, 2007). Due to the nature of the program, all high school AP courses have to have the designation approved by the College Board to ensure that they satisfy the Advanced Placement curriculum (College Board, 2014).

While there are many different approaches society could take to creating more justice within the education system, this researcher focused on the type of leadership needed within the AP programs to create more equity and opportunity within the program. In response, research (Marshall & Oliva, 2010) supported examining the type of leadership needed in AP programs with attention to educational leadership that emphasizes equity, ethical values, justice, care, and respect.

Provided in this chapter is a review of the literature and related research studies on leadership in response to demographically changing schools, especially factors that enhance the emergence of social justice as a possible leadership style needed in AP programs. This inquiry emphasizes a connection between leading for social justice as related to the challenges of increasingly diverse environments. Highlighted within this discussion is leadership theory to provide a focus on equity challenges within the AP organizational structure. While providing a myriad of theoretical frameworks, ultimately, the discussion narrows down to the conceptual framework of social justice leadership.



## **Problem of Practice**

Educational attainment is one of the best ways for a person to ensure that they will have a stable future. Unfortunately, post-secondary education attendance and retention data look drastically different for various groups of people depending on their demographics. Harper (2008) revealed alarming statistics for low-income, first generation college students. Abel and Deitz (2014) showed there are economic benefits and personal development benefits for students that can attain college degrees, including earning 56% more than a counterpart with a high school diploma. Similarly, research by Pfeiffer (2014) disclosed that students who attend college enhance their communication skills, gain independence, confidence, and develop grit. If the research is correct, then preparing students to be college-ready should be something that every child in the United States should have access to regardless of race or their socioeconomic background.

Some secondary schools can provide students with access to higher-level courses and college access while in high school. Some options, including AP (College Board, 2020), dual enrollment, and early college and International Baccalaureate courses, are options that schools may provide (International Baccalaureate & College Board, 2020). According to Best Value Schools (2020), over 1,400 schools within the United States participate in the AP Program, whereas only around 800 schools engage with the International Baccalaureate Program. While some schools have the opportunity to provide higher-level courses that expose students to college curriculum and rigor, the student enrollment in those courses do not always mirror the school's enrollment (College Board, 2020). Enrollment in these courses tend to be populated by Caucasian students, while their minority counterparts are taking lower-level classes. As a result, the

International Baccalaureate program has launched a program entitled Bridging the Equity Gap program (International Baccalaureate, 2020). A new census population projection revealed that minority America would become the majority in the year 2045 (Frey, 2018). To that point, the College Board has compared the ethnicity demographic percentage of the class of 2017 with the ethnicity demographic percentage breakdown of AP takers that scored three or higher in the class of 2017 (The College Board, 2018). In the comparison, the College Boards reported Caucasian students made up 56.3% of the graduating classes during the year of 2017. Similarly, they made up 55.6% of the AP exam takers that earned a score of three or higher. Conversely, African- American students made up 14.4%, and Hispanic scholars made up 22.4% of the graduating class of 2017. However, African Americans scoring a three or higher on the AP exam were at 4.3%, and Hispanic scholars were at 22.9% (College Board, 2018). Therefore, the researcher wanted to investigate the social justice leadership characteristics, accountability structures, and teacher behaviors that increase access for minority scholars and economically disadvantaged scholars within these higher-level courses as well as the impact of such characteristics, structures and behaviors on minority student success.

### **Review of the Extant Scholarship**

Within this literature review, illustrated are the impacts of AP programs along with the reasons students choose specific programs. Explained are dual enrollment programs and the International Baccalaureate program followed by the importance of leadership within each of these programs and narrowing down to the conceptual framework of social justice leadership.

## **Impact of Advance Placement Programs**

The College Board, identified in 2011, almost over 3,300 institutions of higher learning in the United States that received and accepted the AP scores. Statistics (College Board, 2015) indicate that girls more than boys were taking the AP examinations with 54% of the makeup being female students compared to 46% of courses comprising male students.

According to the College Board (2015), the quantity of data and published reports by the AP program have increased significantly, and the information has been noteworthy in providing understanding to the schools and to the students who participate in the AP program. According to Park and Wimmer (2016), enrollment of students for the AP program rose to 8.6% in 2016, having 44,906 from the 41,419 enrolled in 2015. The rate of passing these exams also kept pace with the increase in participation, rising to 8.2%. In the year 2016, Latinos and black students increased their participation by 9.9% and 14.1%, respectively. There was an 18% performance increment increase among the Black students compared to the previous years. The performance increment was also significant among the Hispanic students who reported a 10.8% performance increase.

To compare the students enrolled for the AP Program, according to Park and Wimmer (2016), statistically indicated that 26% of Black students, 26% of the Hispanic students and the remaining 32% of white students' population applied for the AP program during the academic year 2014-2015. As noted, Caucasian student population still dominates the pursuit of AP programs compared to other groups. According to Gross (2017), the Department of Education (DOE) is increasing efforts to ensure that such differences in trends between the Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian, and also

Asian students change, and the divide is closed. To compare the students enrolled in the AP program, among all the students that enroll, African-American and Hispanic students make up half the rate compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Gross, 2017). One factor that could contribute to the gap could be the lack of accessibility to AP programs in low-income schools which tend to have higher populations of Black and Hispanic students. In addition, another factor could be the perceived low-quality standards in the schools attended by minority groups. Poor social and low economic standing predisposes these minority groups from enrolling in programs such as AP (Park & Wimmer, 2016). It is also noted that students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to finance their academic needs. Thus, they cannot afford to pay to enroll for the final exam. Other factors like discrimination based on gender and race determine the efficacy of the enrollment into the AP programs. Nonetheless, schools have extensively upheld the AP program disparity by involving more Caucasian students compared to their counterparts' minority students. On the other hand, strategies such as *Race Marched Role Models* have been applied in some schools with larger minority groups to minimize the inequalities by promoting every student regardless of color to effectively compete for the programs like Advanced placement (Davis, 2010).

### **Reasons for Choosing Advanced Placement Programs**

Addressed through the College Board (2017) were many benefits concerning the AP program as students have been encouraged to take up this program to ensure their academic success. Schools still choose to have AP programs due to various reasons. One reason that schools choose the AP program is because research suggests that students are better prepared for college simply by just taking the course (Collins & Lenard, 2014) in

addition schools believe that these programs can develop talents. Moreover, the program assumes the AP coursework as a benchmark instrument for the quality of student learning at the secondary level using standardized curriculums and exams. AP also plays a role in ensuring that support protocols are readily available, particularly for training teachers, support for school district involvement, and test fees for students. Over the past years, the AP program has grown gradually in terms of the courses offered, and the number of students served. AP has gained full backing by many policymakers because of its tested effectiveness in promoting the quality of education (College Board, 2017).

When it comes to students, they may choose AP as a to stand out in the application of admission into colleges while benefiting from earning college credits (College Board, 2020). The AP program exempts students from taking college introductory exams and acts as a means of saving tuition fees while helping students build college skills that will be essential to them as they advance academically. Nevertheless, the success of the AP program can not only be gauged in terms of numbers but also in terms of the additional benefits it has brought to students regarding quality education (Gross, 2017).

The AP program's differentiated curriculum has contributed to the success of the program in the talent development process. Understanding the needs and characteristics of students with the ability for advanced performance in academics and other areas of learning, is the origin of the differentiated curriculum for the gifted learners (Nganga & Kambutu, 2015). In addition, AP supports those students with the capability of demonstrating ability in related academic disciplines such as mathematics, science, humanities, and verbal arts. Consequently, the AP program by design benefits all

students, including those gifted in the education arena. Grey (2017) denoted that AP is designed to factor in the advanced cognitive capacity of the students so that they also can benefit from it and promote the aspect of social justice in education. Even though the AP program is only at high school levels, it still stands a chance to articulate effective skills and processes, specifically among the students.

Talented students who enroll in the AP program do gain several advantages (Torres, 2014). For the sake of the gifted students, the program is essential to them, especially during their high school years because of its ability to offer them the benefit of an accelerated learning process (Torres, 2014). The process of subject acceleration (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, 2014) involves early admission to college and accreditation of the exam series from moderate to mild, signaling not only a statistical difference favoring these methods but also one that is academically imperative.

The second identifiable benefit of the AP program is its stress on higher-order thinking skills. As per the research (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, 2014), for one to teach critical thinking, he/she requires tactics that are in a certain domain and hence build a strong knowledge base in the students. However, critical thinking is relying on the support of collaborative inquiry (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, 2014).

The mandate of the AP program is to aid in the college preparation and readiness of students. Hence, the students that have interests in attending college and university should consider the importance of undertaking an AP course before joining college or university (Kyburg, 2014). With the readiness achieved from AP course instruction, students have increased options and time, allowing them to consider options that lead to higher achievements, such as taking more vigorous classes at the college level, adding a

double major or a minor or expanding awareness by taking more than one electives (Kyburg, 2014). Moreover, as a result of undertaking the AP program, the student can develop college-level academic skills, improving their eligibility for a scholarship as well as boosting their interests in college-level education (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, 2014). Notably, through the help of the program, students can save money on their overall education with the potential ability to graduate early, consequently saving money on tuition and other college costs (Kyburg, 2014).

### **Dual Enrollment Program**

According to Northern Virginia Community College (2017), dual enrollment refers to a school program that enables the student to enroll in two separate but academically related institutions. In most cases, dual enrollment refers to a high school student taking college and university courses concurrently as they navigate high school courses as well. Students can simultaneously earn credits in the high school that enable them to progress into receiving a high school diploma and potentially as much as an associate degree (Smith, 2011). If students excel in their college classes, college credit is granted and is applicable to their high school diploma as well as to a college degree or certificate (Smith, 2011). Per Northern Virginia Community College (2017), there are various types of dual enrollment that include academics whereby students can earn a high school credit towards a high school diploma and college credit towards Baccalaureate or an Associate Degree at the same time. According to Strong (2008), dual enrollment programs revolve around career or technical exposure where students have the chance to earn both credit for high school and a college diploma simultaneously (Smith, 2011). Additionally, this program enables early access where highly qualified high school

students have the chance to enroll in a full-time college and, at the same time, earn secondary school credits in preparation for the award of an Associate or Baccalaureate degree (Strong, 2008).

Davis (2010) identified three programs that enable students in high school to obtain early admission into college. The first, according to Davis, is the accelerated high school that allows students to advance their college career while still in high school. The second program is dual academic enrollment, allowing credit opportunities to eligible high school students to enroll in college classes while attending secondary school classes obtaining college credit where applicable (Smith, 2011). The third program is the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program. The International Baccalaureate is an international educational foundation that offers career focused educational programs in the high school setting, allowing enrollment for students aged 16 to 19 years who are juniors and seniors (Davis 2010).

#### **Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs**

According to Smith (2011), the two programs, AP and IB have significant similarities and differences. AP program is for students who are craving to be challenged in their academic coursework more than typically offered in the general curriculum. Similarly, the International Baccalaureate program also offers a difficult set of courses requiring advanced intellectual capabilities. While the AP program is much larger and commonly known when compared to the International Baccalaureate program both programs portray an outstanding strength in shaping young people's lives in America (Davis, 2010).



The first noticeable difference between the two programs is that they have different educational objectives. Notably, the International Baccalaureate program tends to take a more holistic approach to education, while the AP program is subject focused. Comparatively, students have the chance to either earn college credits with both of the programs (Smith, 2011) and both of the programs requiring an end of course or program examination to obtain credit. Thus, depending on their performance, students get the chance to apply credits to their higher learning. In order for students to take the IB exam, enrollment in an IB class is required. In contrast, students can take an AP exam without necessarily taking a similar AP course (College Board, 2017). Nevertheless, what enhances each of these programs is the leadership that exists within the organization.

### **Leadership Framework**

To enhance the opportunity of students, specifically in the AP program, needed is a leader dedicated to reaching out to all communities and providing them with the resources, they need to achieve the same levels of success as their counterparts. Several types of leadership styles could potentially remedy this issue, but some may be more effective than others may. Examined within the scope of this inquiry were the following leadership theories: Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), Transformational Leadership (Burns, 2003), and Social Justice Leadership (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

### **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf first suggested servant leadership in 1970 (Northouse, 2016, p. 224) point out that a different concept, servant leadership, truly exemplifies the adage “to lead, one must serve.” As Northouse explained, servant leadership emphasizes followers. A strong servant leader will “put followers first, empower them, and help develop their full

personal capacities” (Northouse 2016, p. 225). These leaders display a strong sense of altruism and morality (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). In his original writing, *The Servant as a Leader* (1970), Greenleaf affirmed:

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p.4)

Applying this description to the context of equity in the Advanced Placement program, a servant leader could be a strong candidate for initiating change in the demographics of the program and providing more students of color with the opportunity to be involved. According to the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1970), this type of person would be very receptive and actively try to improve the experiences of those involved in their program. They have ideal qualifications for a professional in the field of education as their values directly align with many educators, who strive to inspire in their students: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Ebbrecht & Martin, 2017; Northouse, 2016, p. 227-229). These traits also are characteristics of an exemplary leader who demonstrate a genuine investment in the lives and education of the students with whom they interact. Patterson (2003), labeled such leadership is “agape love,” an unconditional, unparalleled caring for another.

Wheeler (2012) explored the concept of servant leadership in settings involving administrators, educators, and students. Using Greenleaf's (1970) definition of a servant leader as a model, he identified ten characteristics and principles of this leadership style. He first stated that a servant leader could easily be mistaken as being pretentious or perhaps condescending. Wheeler challenged the reader by addressing "the question of whether we are willing to accept the consequences of our actions. For example, if we [educators] are strong moral leaders, our actions will no doubt be seen by some as suggesting righteousness or a holier-than-thou attitude" (2012, p. 27). These leadership principles align with Northouse's (2016) characteristics, of a true servant leader. A key value of Wheeler's (2012) argument that many leadership theories do not offer the opportunity for self-reflection- an action taken by a true servant leader. Exploring these same concepts of Greenleaf's (1970) work, Frick (2004) further analyzed servant leadership by breaking down the word "leadership," as so many other texts only define a "servant." He affirmed the following in the foreword of his book *Robert K. Greenleaf A Life of Servant Leadership* (2004):

Much of what is written today on the subject focuses on power, either explicitly or implicitly. This occurs because leadership has, in its colloquial use, become a synonym for "boss-ship"- as when we use the word "leader" to refer to a person in the position of greatest authority. This is tragic and undermines progress in developing real leadership. If the word "leader" is a mere synonym for boss or positional authority, it has no meaning at all... Moreover, being a boss hardly guarantees being a leader. Many occupy positions of great authority and contribute little leadership. (Frick, 2004, p. IX-X)

This critical analysis is essential as it dissects the entirety of the nature of servant leadership, further confirming that the character of a true servant leader in an educational setting, is always modeling the behaviors and values to those one is aiming to impress, the students (Frick, 2004; Greenleaf, 1970).

In another study Paris and Peachey (2013), explained the practical value of servant leadership (pg. 384-386). Some of the key points include the proven effectiveness of a servant leader in the following categories: Cross-Cultural Applicability, Team Level Effectiveness, and Followers' Well Being. These conclusions were from studies done by scholars, such as Patterson (2003), as well as research done by Joseph and Winston (2005). Joseph and Winston's (2005) identified the element of trust as a topic needing further elaboration. "Trust and respect are the highest in circumstances where a community is created through service in which the liability of "each for each other" and "all for one" is unlimited (Joseph & Winston, 2005, p.11). This conceptualization explored the "institutional trust" that is necessary with a servant leader (Joseph & Winston, 2005, p. 11). Consequently, an entire environment of ethics, empathy, and healing is required for the servant leader to be effective.

While the ideal and practice of servant leadership are admirable, it comes with challenges. "Unlike other leadership theories which are defined by the *actions* of the leader, servant leadership relates to the *character* who has a heart for serving and ministering to the needs of others" (Lee & Jackson, 2017, p. 276). Consequently, for servant leadership to be highly effective, ingrained in the foundation must be the formal and informal organizational values of equity. However, since the concept of servant-

leadership appears to be so multi-dimensional, it is difficult to measure (Lee & Jackson, 2017).

Additionally, often servant leaders are viewed as weak leaders, as they are perceived as followers (Northouse, 2016). The concern of care towards the group is seen as a failure to make decisions or placing too much time on human resources instead of the organization's goals. Risks for the organization could be that production and goals may not be at the forefront (Northouse, 2016). Thus, due to the stated purpose of this study, with the focus on the leader and not the follower, eliminated as a conceptual framework was this leadership theory.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Another leadership theory potentially suitable for creating change is transformational leadership (Burns, 2003). This style of leadership has similar qualities to servant leadership (Northouse, 2016). In this style, like servant leadership, the leader puts the needs of the group before their own (Fassinger, Buki, Shulman, Varghese, Nolan, Bihm, & Rasheed, 2017; Northouse). A transformational leader highly values one's followers and possesses a strong appreciation for humanity and justice (Burns, 2003; Northouse).

As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2016). It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals and includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. As argued by Northouse, "[It] moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership." (p. 175-176) Attributed to some

of the people with the most significant historical impacts recorded is this leadership style. Leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (McGuire & Hutchings, 2007), Gandhi (Fassinger, Buki, Shulman, Varghese, Nolan, Bihm, & Rasheed, 2017), and the current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatzo (Bentz, 2012), have all exhibited transformational leadership traits.

Despite the similarities noted between transformational and servant leadership, there are key differences that distinguish the two (Northouse, 2016). While their approaches towards directing their followers are similar, their attitudes make a profound difference. When discussing transformational leadership, Avolio (1999) characterized it as perhaps “anti-democratic.” When putting transformational and servant leadership side-by-side, a servant leader will genuinely serve their follower’s wishes. In contrast, a transformational leader will make one’s vision known and then attempt to transform followers to complete the same goal (Northouse, 2016). Northouse further explained that transformational leaders could be viewed as putting their needs and their goals above others, despite their high altruistic tendencies. He also pointed out “followers can influence leaders just as leaders can influence followers” (2016, p. 193). A transformational leader will have strengths in motivating and inspiring change in one’s followers whether they be administrative, educational, or students. Nevertheless, they will have a difficult time suiting the program to fit the people involved, rather than their personal needs. Stump (2016) acknowledged the “four I’s” of transformational leadership as “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (pg. 42-43).

Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership can take a person beyond their self-interest through these four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Stump, 2016). The followers' self-awareness, maturity, self-actualization, and concern for the well-being of others increases while under transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Idealized influence is realized when, “the leader envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, sets an example to be followed, sets high standards of performance, and shows determination and confidence” (Bass, 1999, p. 11) by being influential through ideals. The ideals and the leader inspire followers to go beyond themselves and dedicate themselves to a movement or mission. One example of this is choosing to join the military to serve one's country (Bass, 1999).

Inspirational motivation was created and separated from charismatic leadership because it is believed that one can still be inspiring “through the use of simple words, slogans, symbols, and metaphors” without necessarily being charismatic (Bass, 1999, p. 214). Identifying with charisma in a leader is not necessary to understand the importance of a mission. Regardless, leaders can instill confidence and motivate their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993), by articulating and communicating a clear vision and detailing a clear plan.

Displayed Intellectual stimulation occurs when “the leader helps followers to become more innovative and creative” (Iyigun, 2019, p. 281). Leaders need to involve their followers in the decision-making process. Doing so allows followers to get creative and innovative in identifying solutions to problems. During the process, the leader

gathers ideas from their followers without criticizing their followers' efforts. Instead, the leader helps them think through the problem and their ideas by steering them in the right direction through conversation and framing problems (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Individualized consideration is when “leaders pay attention to the developmental needs of followers and support and coach the development of their followers” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). On a simple level, it is the leader treating their followers as individuals instead of treating them as a collective.

While the components of transformational leadership are essential in a changing organization (Bass, 2009; Bass & Avolio, 1993), it is not necessarily a good fit for an established organization. For that reason, transformational leadership was not used as the conceptual framework.

### **Social Justice Leadership**

To understand the principles of social justice theory, it is essential to understand what social justice is and is not. Theoharis (2007) explained that social justice is “disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote the marginalization and exclusionary process” (p. 223). As a social justice leader, the primary concern is increasing equity across all areas for those affected (Furman, 2016). Perhaps a combination of all of the different types of effective, follower-based leadership models (Marshall & Olivia, 2010) previously discussed, this leader can provide a democratic environment, serve as a figure for the head of the organization, and understand the systems that perpetuate inequality. All of this is because the social justice leader displays extraordinary levels of empathy. This person will go beyond the confines of being a “good leader,” and will inspire change, hope, morality, ethics, and justice in their



followers (Theoharis, 2007). As explained by Furman (2016), this type of leadership should be the standard in any educational setting. With the rapid changes in the demographic of a school population, the safety and success of students should be the top priority for any educator (Furman). As a theory, social justice leadership research is still limited on how the theory should be appropriately practiced (Furman 2016; Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017; Theoharis, 2007).

While servant (Greenleaf, 1970) and transformational (Burns, 2003) leaders both have a strong desire to care for others and exemplify a robust moral code and inspire change for their followers, the social justice leader wants all of these things for everyone, follower or not (Northouse, 2016). The very concept of social justice implies equality for society, and the social justice leader's goal is to provide opportunities for those who may have previously not been able to afford them (Furman, 2016), resulting in alignment with the purpose of this inquiry.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Various scholars have defined social justice leadership in different ways. Scholars like Marshal and Olivia (2010) defined social justice as processes and structures developed to disrupt and transform conditions that would cause marginalization and exclusion. Zaid (2010) noted social justice referred to the process of altering provisions set by the institutions and organizations, by regularly engaging in regaining, appropriating, nourishing, and evolving essential human rights, fairness, equity, equality, socio-economic, educational, and personal dimensions. Theoharis (2007) argued social justice leadership exists when the head of schools makes subjects of gender, race, disability, color, class, sex, historical, and currently sidelining factors that are essential to

the advocacies of America important aspects of their work. He goes on to note such leaders come up with policies and resource allocation not for raising test scores, but for the benefit of a given selected group based on race, socioeconomic, language, gender, or other social inequalities. Moreover, Collins and Lenard (2014) postulated that social justice leaders take into consideration the reason why and how schools are not meeting the needs of all students. They further formulate the role that the schools and principals can play in rebuilding social order. Such leaders (Collins & Lenard; Martin & Miller, 2017) are vital in urban contexts due to the factors of the setting that are complex and relating to immigration and race, poverty and language barriers, and other issues that are predominantly severe.

Social justice leaders act as change agents that are involved in leadership that transforms (Northouse, 2016). Therefore, for them to carry out the transformative work, they first need to develop an awareness that is heightened on marginalization, oppression, and exclusion (Martin & Miller, 2017). Consequently, they must understand and recognize how the arrangement of power and practices in institutions favor some groups and detriment others (Shield, 2010). Educators can act as transformation agents based on awareness by constructing and managing new possibilities of social justice in their respective schools. Thus, a social justice leader is an activist and continually works for a noticeable change in their schools (Marshal & Olivia, 2010). Furthermore, for the social justice leaders in schools to function as transformative agents for change in challenging contexts, the leaders must show a high level of commitment to the social justice agenda and embrace such efforts persistently (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017). In addition, for the educational leaders to address social justice and marginalization

issues (Northouse, 2016) they must work in creating inclusive practices in the institution of learning. Notably, their caring relationship should be based on authentic communication, and their relationships should be holistic and morally grounded (Marshal & Olivia, 2010). Therefore, the dialogue is a key notion in situations of diversity and is beneficial in including the marginalized groups meaningfully in cultural institutions such as schools. Importantly, leaders should be more engaged in self-evaluation and critically audit themselves to enable growth and embrace quality social justice leadership (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).

Research by Marshal and Olivia (2010) on social justice leadership has shown there has been a significant rise in the promotion of the concept of social justice leadership. As a result, there has been a growing collection of literature used in the analysis of social justice leadership (Kathleen, 2004). Ranging from the empirical analyses of the difficulties experienced by the social justice leaders (Northouse, 2016) to conceptual opinions of preparation programs for leadership that focuses on contemplations of social justice (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).

Rosa (2014) postulated social justice preparation for educational leaders has the capability of organizing around a set of skills. The first such skill is identifying, challenging, and counteracting preconceptions and discrimination (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017). The second, fostering a norm of high prospects in the facilities and all the students. The third is facilitating the structuring of a rigorous curriculum that is diverse and comprehensive. The next skill is supporting the development of practices that are just in the social context of the entire field of education.

Finally, developing communities that are education-focused; and sustaining an extensive commitment to unqualified equity (Rosa, 2014).

Several barriers to social justice leadership exist (Scheurich, 2004). These barriers include policies at the local and national level that are against social justice and equity. Another barrier is valuing leadership that is technically based rather than morally based. This could lead to deficit thinking and marginalization of the minority who does not have technical expertise (Martin & Miller, 2017). These barriers have derailed the implementation of social justice in schools. To enhance these barriers, bureaucratic and market structures have disrupted the democratic attempts in schools (Scheurich, 2004).

### **Impact of Social Justice in Education in High Schools**

Tickle (2017) argued high school leaders should promote social justice in education. He identified leaders of high schools and other institutions of learning that have formulated strategies to ensure that discriminating based on race, color, gender, socioeconomic standing, and even disability do not stumble the students by exposing them to injustices (Tickle, 2017). Some schools have promoted social justice by introducing and training teachers and changing educational policies whereby educators act in accordance with social justice principles (Office of Social Justice, 2016).

Social justice is an issue that remains in the educational sector of America (Northouse, 2016). Identified areas include lower-level engagement of parents, funding, and a lack of educational resources and supports. Additionally, children who leave or drop out of school at an early age, often end up leading a life of crime or live without good standing (Office of Social Justice, 2016).

Notably, as per the various conducted research (Martin & Miller, 2017) on the cause of inequality in the education system, establishing both social and economic factors play a remaining role in the child's education. As Gollub (2002) noted, the mental growth of a child is determined by the effect of alienation, racism, and poverty and this was further highlighted by Darling-Hammond (2016).

According to Torres (2014), before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the American economy depended on manufacturing labor, which required workers with no formal education. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the American economy shifted to an information-based system. This required well-educated, literate employees with critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and technological expertise. As a result, not every student could meet these required goals because some of the students have not attended effective schools due to the inequality in funding, lack of positive school environments, or the lack of preparedness of teachers to name a few. Through Torres's critical examination, the well-performing schools were the schools attended by the Caucasian students and were well equipped with the necessary resources and educational facilities for the students' success (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017). On the other hand, the schools attended by the minority students were less equipped. These facts resulted in minority students having lower academic scores. Therefore, these processes of transformation in the economy played a role in bringing about the inequality in the education system (Torres, 2014).

## **Discrimination Based on Race in Schools**

Tickle (2017) found Hispanic, and the poor African-American students attend schools in the urban centers, while the middle class African-American and majority of the white students have migrated to the private schools. All these are the impacts of social justice (or lack thereof) in education. According to Tickle (2017), social justice remains a primary concern for both scholars and educational practitioners. Historically, the issue of educational inequality has been noticed in political environments through the media (Picower, 2012), placing it at the forefront of scholarly discourse.

In school leadership (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Northouse, 2016), many scholars, in an attempt to explore the real meaning of social justice in education, have examined the scope of social justice leadership and repercussions for the direct preparation programs (Martin & Miller, 2017). However, the definition of social justice remains an under-researched concept in the education sector. The terms such as equality, equity, inequality, affirmative action, and diversity define social justice, but the terms have different meanings depending on the national contexts (Marshall, & Oliva, 2010). Therefore, two or more groups can oppose each other based on their interpretation of the term and thus propagate indifferences under the protection of social justice (Long, 2017).

Despite the critiques and ambiguities in the definition of the term social justice, there is one common understanding of the term among scholars, the marginalization of minority groups (Callahan, 2006). Consequently, social justice puts more emphasis on the minority group's experiences and inequalities in the outcomes of education and opportunities (Callahan, 2006). Again, for these reasons, social justice leadership has proved to be the most potentially effective at eradicating these problems (Theoharis,

2007), and considers the aspects of focusing on the most underserved, underrepresented, and undereducated and mostly oppressed groups.

Additionally, social justice seeks to eliminate marginalization in schools (Northouse, 2016). Therefore, from the different understandings of social justice, it involves undoing and identifying the unjust and oppressive acts and replacing them with those more equitable and culturally accepted (Bull, 2015). According to Bull (2015), social justice leadership seeks to investigate and provide solutions for issues that give rise to inequalities in society. The nature of social justice leadership is a powerful tool for determining whether the students show signs of success and satisfaction in their schools (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Consequently, leadership in schools is the best agent in spreading social justice in educational settings that serve diverse students (Bull, 2015; Martin & Miller, 2017).

According to the different themes that elaborate on the issue of social justice, they all share the common aspect of eradicating problematic societal behaviors (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Consequently, social justice involves being action-oriented and transformative, inclusive and democratic, committed and persistent, reflective, relational and caring, and oriented towards schooling that is socially just (Zajda, 2010).

Education scholars like Marshall and Olivia (2010) have issued a warning that leadership on social justice stands blatantly contrary to the prevailing school leadership models that emphasize management. Social justice leadership has the responsibility of creating truly equitable schools (Martin & Miller, 2017), in addition to needing to focus on the pedagogical implications of social justice. Therefore, social justice leaders who work toward improving the teaching and learning would be a good fit for program such

as AP as these leaders focus on the need that every student can gain equal opportunities in education to promote their academic excellence.

### **Summary**

This literature review has critically analyzed the field of social justice in education and the Advanced Placement program. The literature has provided the statistics of Advanced Placement programs between minority groups such as the Hispanics, African- Americans and Caucasian students and the discrepancies that exist. The literature review has delved into the issues of dual enrollment programs that enables the student to enroll in two separate but academically related institutions. Also, discussed was the AP program that helps high school students by adequately equipping them with knowledge and skills essential for college life. Presented was the International Baccalaureate programs that allows junior and senior students to enroll for such programs, and the benefits of each program were enumerated.

The literature revealed social justice leadership is the primary tool in curbing the social injustice problems existing within schools. Additionally, revealed were issues of discrimination, although through the application of social justice principals' and leaders, it is minimized. However, the public education system still requires continued progress. Consequently, additional research should be conducted to understand the leadership needed to enhance the AP program.

In conclusion, more effort needs to be in place to eliminate various issues of social injustice. These efforts to eliminate must include, but are not limited to, inequalities and discrimination in terms of race, gender, class, age, or ethnic origin. However, despite the efforts, social injustices persist in various institutions in America



whereby the African-American and the Hispanic populations are isolated from receiving adequate educational opportunities from specific programs like AP. However, practicing social justice in the academic arena will continue to become more culturally pronounced. Positive social justice leadership has proven to have a profound impact on the performance of students and examining the use of it further will lead to a more equitable American educational system.

**CHAPTER FOUR:  
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE**

## **Introduction**

The history of the United States educational system has proven to reveal gaps in young adults' achievement from marginalized populations and urban environments (Marshal & Olivia, 2010). Therefore, this study took an in-depth examination of a school in the heart of the urban core with high minority students which is seeing higher levels of students matriculating into college. This research was conducted in the Midwest and within the urban core. The school was surrounded by crime and death; however, its students continued to defy the odds.

The analyzed data included school administrators and department lead interviews, teacher surveys, and internal document review. After a review of the data and interviews, conducted was an analysis to find common themes (Merriam, 2009), which will be presented in the discussion of findings.

This section presents an overview of the study and the data that answers each of the questions, followed by discussing those findings. Additionally, presented will be implications for practice and recommendations.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were developed to investigate what an urban school with a high number of minority scholars were doing. The following research questions were asked:

RQ 1: What social justice leadership characteristics are principals practicing in an urban school with high minority student populations in Advanced Placement programs?

RQ 2: What strategies and instructional practices are teachers using in an urban school with high minority student populations in Advanced Placement programs?

RQ3: What accountability structures for teachers and principals are in place that creates a college readiness environment?

### **Connection to Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

In examining leadership styles and its impact on educator and scholar success, reviewed were three leadership styles including servant leadership (Greanleaf, 2002), transformational leadership (Burn, 2003) and social justice leadership (Theoharris, 2007). For this research, it was determined that social justice leadership was the most appropriate leadership theory to utilize primarily because the school's focus was to help marginalized populations such as Hispanic and African American youth from the urban core matriculate into collegiate experiences after their secondary career had ended. Bredeson (2004) and Jean-Marie (2008) found that social justice leaders focus on establishing equitable learning spaces. Specifically, the focus of this inquiry was to examine how this one Midwest Urban High School with a high minority population and a high AP placement accomplished this equity focus.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

Conducted at Anywhere High School were both the qualitative and quantitative data collection. For the qualitative portion, conducted by Zoom were ten individual interviews with school administration and department leads. Questions designed by the researcher were used to gauge the perceptions of the school administrative team around college readiness, Advanced Placement courses and accountability measures for staff. Interviews were conducted via an online platform where they were recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Due to COVID- 19, only one observation occurred, but it was of a faculty meeting and observed were administrators and teachers' interactions. Lastly,

analyzed were documents, including the scholar handbook, the district's convocation video, and Advanced Placement data, to provide additional context. Upon completion of the transcribing all interviews, participants received the transcripts allowing member checking to ensure accuracy. Participants were given the opportunity to notify the researcher if any additional updates or changes were needed and none were noted.

Additionally, sent was a staff survey via the web to forty-seven classroom educators to evaluate their understanding of college readiness, the school's Advanced Placement Program and other best practices. The response rate of the survey was 74% with 35 of 47 surveys returned. Centered on their teaching strategies, equity school culture, and college readiness perceptions were the survey questions.

### **Presentation of the Demographic Data**

Presented in this section is the analysis of survey respondents broken down by gender, ethnicity, longevity in the educational profession, the highest level of education attainment. Discussed and presented visually will be these demographics of the respondents.

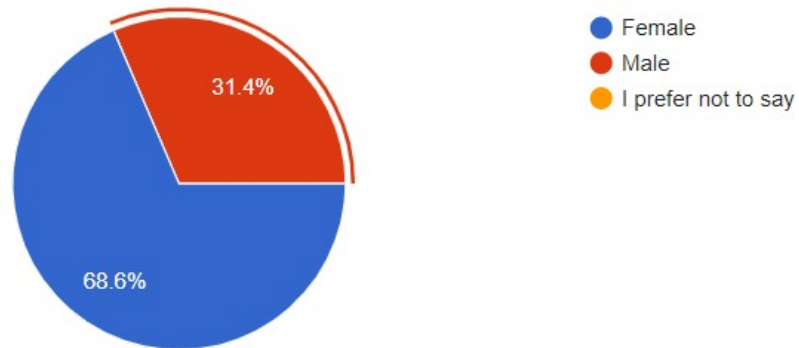
Illustrated in Table 1 is the gender of the respondents. More than 68% of the respondents were female and 31% were male. This distribution does not represent the actual make-up of the total faculty population but does reflect the teacher population. Regarding the gender configuration of the staff, it is unlike most schools in America. Traditionally in secondary schools women make up 58.4% of the occupation (Data USA, 2020). However, at Anywhere High School, there is a higher male to female ratio. Currently, the school has a 60% male and 40% female staff ratio of staff. However, 68%

female gender of the respondents were more representative of most schools, while not representing Anywhere High School.

Table 1 *Participant Classification by Gender*

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35 responses

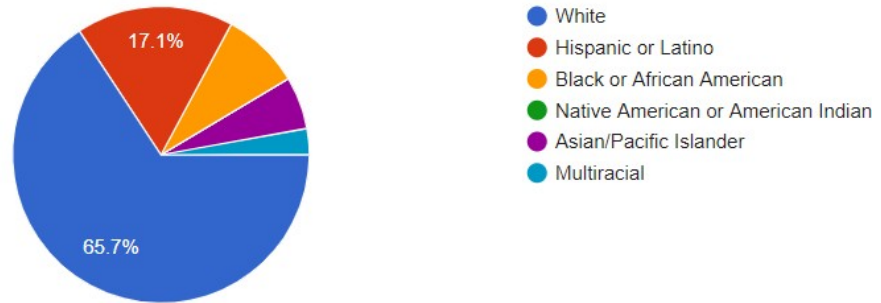


Presented in Table 2 are the respondent's self-identification of ethnicity. Nearly 66% of the respondents were Caucasian, followed by 17% Hispanic, 8.6% African-American. While that composition represents urban high schools throughout America, it is not representative of the student population at Anywhere High School. The student population is 98.6 percent of the student body identifying as African-American or Hispanic (Chicago Public Schools, 2018).

Table 2 *Participant Classification by Ethnicity*

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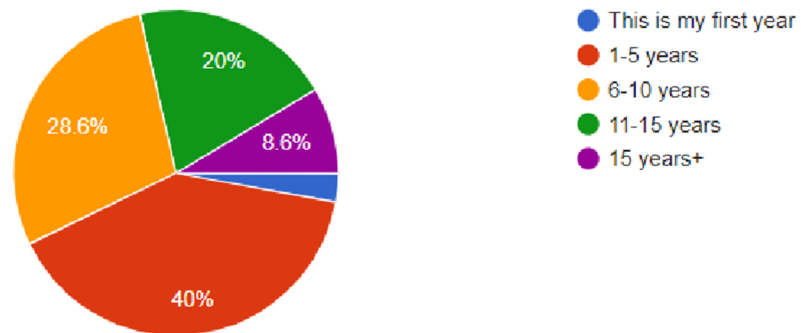
35 responses



Highlighted in Table 3 is the educator’s longevity within education systems. Forty percent of the staff reported they were within their first five years of teaching. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents had at least six to ten years’ experience. Nearly 30% of the respondents had more than eleven years of experience and 8% had over fifteen years of experience. Thus, nearly forty percent of the teachers had considerable experience, while forty percent were within their first five years.

*Table 3 Participant Classification by Longevity in Education*

35 responses

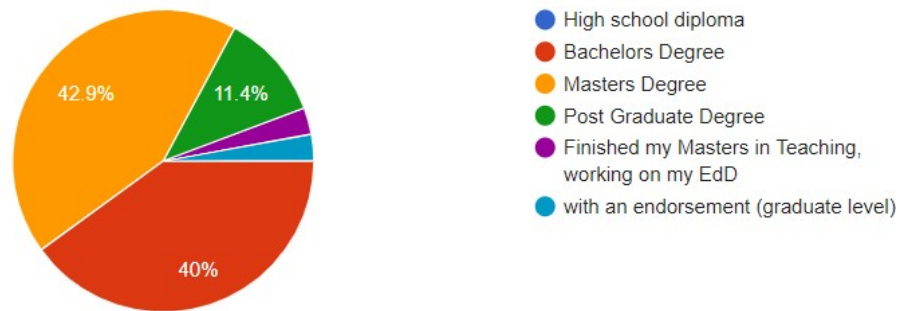


As for educational attainment, underscored in Table 4, is the demographic that 40% of the educators have a bachelor’s degree, while conversely over 42% of the staff

have a master's degree. In addition, 11% of the teachers had a post Master's degree or certification. Therefore, the majority of the teachers had an advance degree.

Table 4 *Participant Classification by Highest Level of Education*

35 responses



In summary, the demographic data revealed that the majority of respondents' were female and Caucasian. Moreover, the data revealed that the majority of teachers had experience and had earned a Masters or above graduate degree.

### **Presentation of Findings**

Presented below are the quantitative and qualitative data from this inquiry. Per the convergent design, analyzed were both qualitative and quantitative data when they occurred separately, followed by a convergence of the data to further understand the problem of practice from both administrators' and teachers' perceptions. During the data collection process, collected were qualitative responses from ten interviews and additional feedback on the distributed survey's open-ended section. Then collected were quantitative data via the survey. A 4-point Likert Scale instead of a 5-point scale forced participants to choose which indicator most closely aligned with their thoughts (Fink, 2013) on the teacher survey. Teachers were given the 20 statements and asked to indicate which choice between strongly disagree, disagree, agreed, and strongly agreed was



greatest aligned with their beliefs. In addition, after each question, teachers could provide additional context that contributed to a more robust qualitative analysis.

### **Research Question One**

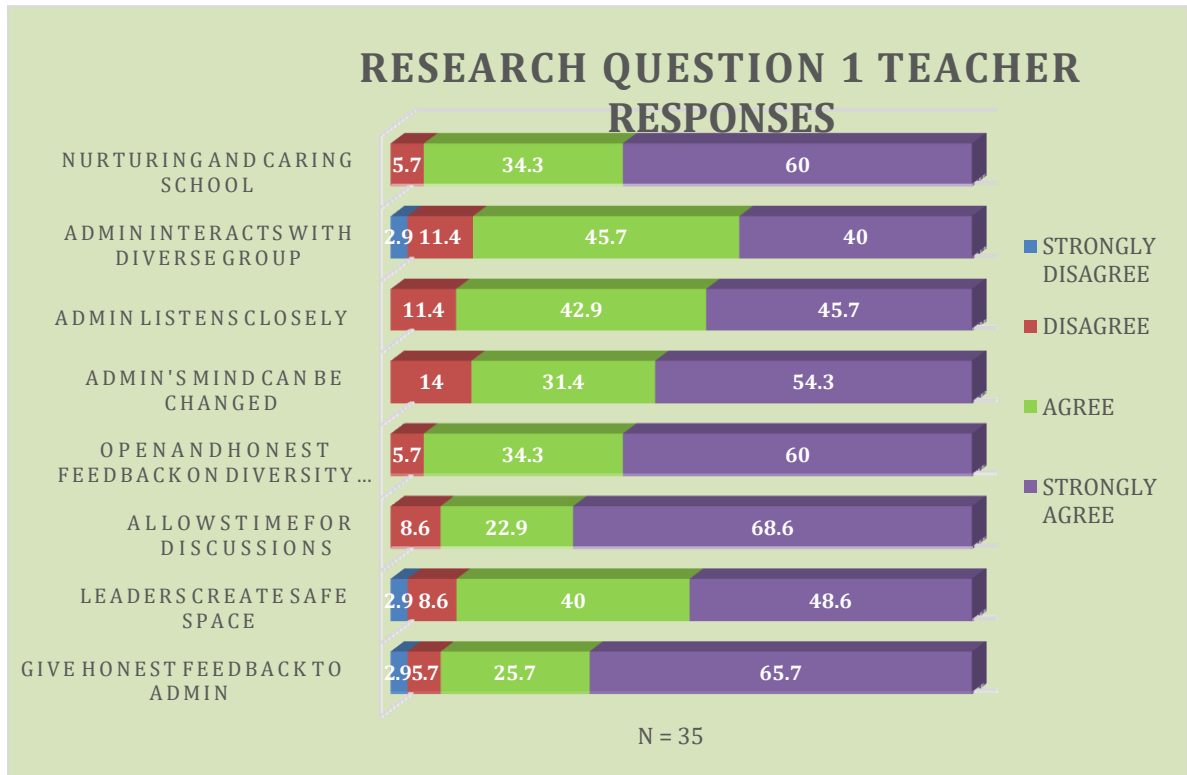
*What social justice leadership characteristics are principals practicing in an urban school with high minority student populations in Advanced Placement programs?*

When asked about their school leadership's characteristics, teachers identified eight behavior traits (see Table 5). The top five characteristic traits included being creating a nurturing and caring ethos with 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing, mind open to change with 86% agreement, open and honest feedback on diversity with 93% agreement, allowing time for critical conversations with almost 91% agreement, and 92% felt that they could give honest and open feedback to their administrator. While the results demonstrated an overwhelming agreement that administrators demonstrated adaptability, understood and valued diversity, were respectful of all ideas, and valued autonomy, there was a caveat regarding administrators interacting with diverse groups, creating safe space for all, and not accepting honest feedback from all teachers. Each of these variables registered 2.9% of teachers strongly disagreeing. Thus, while the vast majority of the teachers felt that administrators understood and valued diversity, a small percentage of teachers did not see all administrators interacting with all diverse groups.

Moreover, while the percentage was small on the acknowledgment of creating safe space for all, a few teachers did not feel as safe as the majority on sharing information either with other teachers or with the administration on issues of equity, and this same small group of teachers felt they were not always heard. However, most teachers viewed the administrators as individuals who valued diversity, wanted teachers

to have a say regarding diversity, and were willing to hold those critical conversations on diversity that lead to an equity ethos in the school—all of these characteristics aligned with a social justice orientation for the leaders.

*Table 5 Teacher Responses Related to Research Question 1*



Additional comments from the open-ended survey questions included that the administrative team was receptive to feedback by providing a myriad of opportunities for teachers to provide feedback weekly. Over twenty percent of teacher respondents gave examples that the school has a healthy communication process. Such an example identified a weekly communication that goes out to staff with a link for them to provide anonymous feedback. Ninety percent of the respondents noted they could provide informal and formal feedback at any time to administrators. As one teacher stated, "Staff will see immediate changes based on feedback given to administration." A different

teacher reported, "Administration is humble and respectful to change." A third teacher reported that the administration team is "feedback oriented and led with a service-first mindset."

Conversely, the survey statement around the changing of the administration's mind had 14% of the staff disagreeing. When delving deeper the comments revealed statements from teacher participants sometimes denoting staff felt that decisions had already been made; however, only two respondents clarified this behavior. These teachers noted, "due to time restraints, it appears that decisions are made without everyone's input." However, most of the staff reported that they could provide feedback in various ways, including anonymously through surveys, open forums regularly held to discuss potential policy changes, and often those changes did happen. As one teacher stated, "There is a sense of trust from leadership top-down. It is the head principal's priority to ensure a diverse range of voices are heard and influence what we do as a community." Similarly, another teacher wrote, "the open-door policy is not just lip service. Our staff is open from top to bottom".

In keeping with being open to feedback, school administration being respectful to staff was another agreement among teachers. As a teacher described,

"We have an extremely respectful administration; they make space for all voices, created avenues for discussion, encourage people to speak out, actively listen, thanking people for their honesty, and ultimately, making changes based on feedback."

Nevertheless, although there was space and opportunity to provide feedback, there was also a need for improvement. For example, a teacher stated, "School administration has told us that we can give feedback and has given many ways to voice how we feel. It

is also tricky because we want to communicate, but the workload is intense with deadlines after deadlines.”

The teaching staff, as well as the administrative team, mentioned results-driven focus numerous times. The district had high expectations for its schools, and the administrative team at Anywhere High School had high expectations based on results regarding scholar academic growth, test scores, and college matriculation. More specifically, much emphasis was placed on the national Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). An administrative interview revealed that during the 2016 -2017 school year, Illinois' state mandated that all juniors take the SAT exam with the essay portion of the exam. As a result, the school shifted its energy to focus and align with the SAT. Therefore, administration and staff had regularly scheduled data meetings to discuss scholar progress, growth, and possible modifications to teaching strategies. The school's administration team emphasized getting greater results for their scholars. In various interviews, often mentioned was the importance of the SAT scores. As one administrator stated, "scholars receiving 1070 on the exam is used as a target score and should be the focus for all teachers.”

Furthermore, this target score was discussed often. Confirmed via the staff survey was the emphasis on the SAT is a priority and school administration being results-driven. As one teacher denoted, "both SAT and grades are looked at and are the primary focus of being results-driven." Another teacher stated, "All students are expected to do well on the SAT."

Additionally, another administrator stated, "In taking a step back and looking at where we are, I firmly believe the thing that makes our school great is that we are

outcomes-driven." In line with that administrative colleague, another administrator stated, "Administration is demanding because there are constant high expectations for both staff and students, but this is not seen as a negative." The school administration wanted its scholars to excel post high school because they knew the odds facing young adults from the urban core could be difficult. Thus, the administration made academic results a priority.

Although the school focused on having a higher number of minorities within their Advanced Placement program, administrators also realized they may have had some unknown biases due to selecting initial scholars for the program. Many of the administrators reported that the system was initially set up to push higher-performing scholars into advanced level classes instead of taking easier courses. However, some unintentional consequences have resulted from those decisions. While the school has a high enrollment of Hispanic scholars followed by African-Americans, creating the system of pushing only the top students into the AP courses has resulted in lower numbers of African-American scholars in the Advanced Placement courses. As one administrator stated,

“The question is not why we got there and if it was our fault (because the systems we use at school make it our fault), but the question is what we can do about it? If our goal is to make our AP selection process fairer, we must be outcomes-driven to say that that is what we will do.”

Per the survey given to teachers, the school administration was open to the possibility of having its mind changed. An administrator stated,

“The administration reflects on ways to improve and move forward; we are learners because we are very conscientious that we do not have all the answers but try to find them. The last two years have been rough, and the admin team needed to step up and maintain leadership, which we are doing.”

Overall, the teachers and administrators recognized the need to keep results-focused and adjust when necessary to create an equitable environment for all students.

Additionally, school administration and teaching staff confirmed that the district and school truly value autonomy. During administrative interviews, it solidified that teachers could develop instructional strategies they deemed best for their classroom scholars without full oversight by the administrators. As one administrator noted, "As long as teachers are successful with what they are doing, they can continue to do it." However, teachers stated that they could have instructional autonomy within their classrooms if the SAT growth continued in their classroom.

Another unexpected finding from both the interviews and survey revolved around the United States' current political status. With 2020 being an election year and the United States' current hot topic issues such as police brutality, health care, and the Black Lives Matter movement, there was a new sense of urgency around social justice and equity at Anywhere High School from the district level. Several administrators noted this new emphasis due to media coverage of tragic incidents involving Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbury, and other African Americans throughout the nation. These political issues brought social injustices to the forefront for many within the country, including schools across the nation including Anywhere High School. As a result, several administrators noted the district held leadership forums and town halls and started small discussion groups to understand their schools and networks' perception of equity challenges. During the 2020 convocation, the district administration was highly sensitive to these issues and wanted to make sure the system had been highlighting social justice and equity in all that was happening. The network central office reemphasizing the

social justice focus caused a variety of new activities to occur. As a result, the school's network had done self-evaluations and reflection that led them to discover they had inadvertently established some anti-social justice policies rooted in racism—such policies regarding wearing bracelets and other issues viewed by students as racist. In light of this discovery, the district took a hard stance to address internal issues that may have led to scholars' inequity. As a result, the school district's leadership stated that the district's slogan for the year is "Getting into Good Trouble" by the famous United States Representative, John Lewis.

Hence, the district decided to up the ante on addressing social justice issues, diversity, and racism head-on. In return, tasked with leading this effort within the school is the Anywhere High School leadership team. Accordingly, since the beginning of this school, Anywhere High School implemented various measures for staff to stretch their thinking and create anti-biased and anti-racist policies to create equitable outcomes for all scholars. As the administrative team worked effectively to understand systematic racism, they implemented ways to create staff safe spaces. For example, the entire school participated in a book study entitled, *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo. *The author* addresses such issues as privilege, police brutality, intersectionality, micro-aggressions, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the "N" word." Although identifying and discussing systematic racism can be uncomfortable, the school administration and staff believed it was a step in the right direction to address internal issues. The interviews and the survey reflected that while these challenges are being addressed, the outcomes are not measured yet. Similarly, although the school and district leadership took steps to help

marginalized populations, they also acknowledged they have policies in place that may have inadvertently harmed subpopulations.

Consequently, Anywhere High School's leadership team took the time to reflect upon its policies and actions. As a result, the school developed Anti-Bias Anti-Racist training, also known as ABAR groups within the school. ABAR groups met bi-weekly to discuss various topics around race, school policy, and the book they were studying. The school leadership also created small groups considered safe places, allowing for critical conversations to occur. This allowed the staff to express their thoughts and concerns about racism without judgment and seek ways to maximize social justice within the school setting.

Over 94% of the educators believed that the administration team encouraged and participated in open and honest discussions relating to diversity and social justice. Several teachers' additional feedback stated they enjoyed the diversity, equity, and inclusion training that recently started. Although many teachers reported that the school is working hard to discuss equitable policies and practices, several noted only three administrators encouraged and gave full participation and authenticity to those discussions.

Overwhelmingly the results demonstrated that these teachers viewed their administrators as a leader with a social justice orientation. The majority of teachers perceived their administrators as demonstrating adaptability, understanding, and valuing diversity, were respectful of all ideas, and valued instructional autonomy that focused on equity. Moreover, framed through a result-driven outcome ethos were all of these social justice orientations.



**Research Question 2**

*What strategies and instructional practices are teachers using in an urban school with high minority student populations in Advanced Placement programs?*

Research question two directly connects to strategies and instructional practices that teachers use within schools with Advanced Placement programs. After interviews with school administrators and an Anywhere High School alum who works at the school as well as analysis of documents and teacher surveys, four strategies emerged: high expectations for all scholars, outcomes-based instruction: SAT, culturally relevant teaching, and teacher autonomy.

**High Expectations**

As presented in the school documents, one school-wide strategy since the start of the AP program was the use of a school-made formula to determine if a scholar should be placed in an Advanced Placement course. While at some schools, the AP program allows only top scholars, the administrators and teachers explained that it is different at Anywhere High School because scholars who do not meet the formula's requirement opt-in to the course by request. This is due to the opt-in versus opt-out policy. Similarly, scholars who did not feel they belong in Advanced Placement courses could opt-out, but were highly discouraged. Created and aligned with the school vision of having high expectations for learning was this policy. In addition, it ensured that scholars, who would not usually push themselves to take a higher-level course, such as Advanced Placement, would take the course. Several teachers on the survey identified the need for such a policy because it allowed the student who worked hard to get into the AP courses. As one teacher noted, "Students know themselves better than we sometimes do, and if they want to work hard, we let them."

In trying to create equitable opportunities for scholars, the school has additional policies to support those that want an opportunity to participate. Thus, if a scholar wanted to be in a higher-level course and was not selected, they let the counselor know what they should be allowed to opt-in. In most cases, scholars were allowed the opportunity to take the courses. By the same token, if a scholar wanted to opt-out of the higher-level course, the school made the process more difficult. The scholar must notify the counselor and hold a meeting with the parent and school administration to explain why they did not want to participate in the program. In interviewing three alumni of Anywhere High School who were now working at the school, they confirmed that the opt-in and opt-out program did work. As one alum stated, he did not want to take Advanced Placement courses when first placed into the class. However, the school convinced him and his mom that he just needed to push himself. Once his mother heard about the benefits, the alum continued with the courses. In fact, many of the alums noted they willingly signed up for additional courses once they became seniors. Another alum spoke of friends who could also opt-in to Advance Placement classes and stayed because it was a complicated process to try to exit the classes. Designing the additional step for scholars to opt-out focused on keeping scholars that needed to challenge themselves to continue to take the more rigorous courses and, thus, continued to prepare them for college.

From the school documents, the school used a formula for each course. Listed below is a sample of the formula for the math courses:

Math SAS =  $(80\% * \text{Grades Calculation} * 1.13 \text{ If honors} * \text{PerfectMathScore}) + \text{SAT}$  / 2.

The formula's rationale was that 80% would take a 100% in the class and bring that to a 612 equivalent SAT score. The 1.13 for honors would take an 80% in the class and bring

that up to a 90% average, essentially giving a student that is in honors a 10% bump for working harder in the honors class.

Although the school administration felt that everyone at the school had high expectations, they started investigating their policies and practices. As noted by several administrators, they learned that they may have created policies that had a disparate impact upon subpopulations within the school. For example, African American males left the school in higher numbers, and it was believed that one of the reasons was due to the demerit systems. In years before 2020, the school utilized a demerit system requiring scholars to simulate its expectations. Scholars would receive demerits for various reasons, including not following a strict dress code, not tracking the speaker when asked a question in class, and various other reasons.

Although Anywhere High School had ensured their scholars had exposure opportunities and excellent teaching experiences, there was continued room for growth. One instructional strategy that was a potential growth opportunity included the demerit system. Per the school's handbook, the school used a merit-based program to reinforce positive behavior. Consequently, they also used a demerit-based system to reinforce specific expectations, including self-discipline habits, physical and emotional safety and upholding school cleanliness. Although the merit vs. demerit system was put in place to help scholars, school administration and educators reported that the system had been examined for its negative impacts. One educator stated, "The discipline policy can sometimes make it difficult to create a nurturing environment, but most teachers are very great at building relationships with students." For instance, according to the school's handbook, scholars can receive demerits for various things, including tardiness, dress

code violations, visible or audible cell phones, talking during emergency drills, chewing gum, and a host of other things. However, after evaluating the system, over the years, things have changed. A few years ago, a dress code violation would have been as simple as wearing two bracelets, having visible tattoos, or wearing colored hair had scholars receiving demerits and even suspension. Thus, several scholars, including higher numbers of African-American male scholars, left the school over the years. While the system was not perfect, there were changes that allowed scholars to express themselves more freely. While interviewing, the school administration noted that they had created guidelines that had negatively affected scholar experiences and had pushed some scholars to attend other schools to look at their policies and practices. Nevertheless, as the school continued to evaluate its internal policies, the demerit system had stopped for the school year of 2020-2021.

While most teachers and administrators felt that their policies and teaching strategies demonstrated high expectations due to the school's social justice focus, they continued to want to make sure that all were equitable. Highlighted in Table 6, over 91.4% of the classroom teachers pushed their scholars to take a higher level of rigorous courses. Similarly, over 88% of teachers believed their scholars could attend college. However, when Anywhere High School teachers reflected on their colleagues' thoughts around scholars attending college, the overall percentage of those agreeing dropped to 80%. In further examining teacher feedback, the educators believed that their scholars could go to college, but it should be their choice. For example, one teacher explained that scholars could attend a college, university, or a trade school depending on their passion.

Similarly, another teacher expressed that not every scholar wants to go to college and should not be viewed as less because of choosing an alternative career. They believed that Anywhere High School should prepare scholars for life after high school, but it should be up to the scholars to pursue a college education. After speaking with school administration and the variance in opinions, college preparedness is another aspect of examining policies that they have asked scholars and families to buy into, and they are currently reexamining.

Illustrated in Table 6, 97% of teachers perceived receiving training on best practices to support their scholars. Likewise, 91% of teachers perceived receiving a variety of resources to enhance scholars' learning. With such high numbers of educators, believe that they have been trained on best practices; further analysis was conducted to see why teachers felt this way. The level of support that teachers received within the school helped them feel they were receiving the best practices and supports. At Anywhere High School, each department had a Dean of Instruction that helped coach and guide teachers. Each teacher met with the Dean of Instruction on a bi-weekly basis. In addition, each Dean of Instruction had a small caseload of teachers; therefore, they could provide more support in a traditional setting.

Similarly, the school hired three additional teacher supports that assisted teachers with grading and other duties. All three of the teaching assistants were former Anywhere High School alumni that were currently attending local colleges. The teaching assistants' additional help allowed the classroom teacher to focus on educational experiences for the scholars.

In addition to the teachers' resources, the district also provided an assortment of exposure opportunities that contributed to college-ready scholars. These non-instructional strategies helped support the college readiness experience. For instance, scholars were hand-selected to attend a summer program entitled Summer of a Lifetime throughout the district. At the Anywhere High School, every 10th-grade scholar was expected to participate in the program. The Summer of a Lifetime experience allowed each scholar to travel outside of the city and stay on a college campus via a summer program. The scholars had the opportunity to participate with colleges, including Harvard, Stanford, John Hopkins, and Norte Dame. While on the college campus, each scholar could take an introductory college course or experience a summer program. Alumni staff stated that the summer experience helped prepare them for the college dormitory experience. Similarly, it provided scholars the opportunity to explore campus life. Lastly, the *Summer of a Lifetime* experience exposed scholars to people from different ethnicities that they may not see daily. Anywhere High School was unique in mandating this for all their scholars. Most scholars had a summer experience focused on a STEM experience. Anywhere High School provided this summer experience for their scholars due to a partnership with a local company. That partnership removed the financial barriers associated with the summer experience.

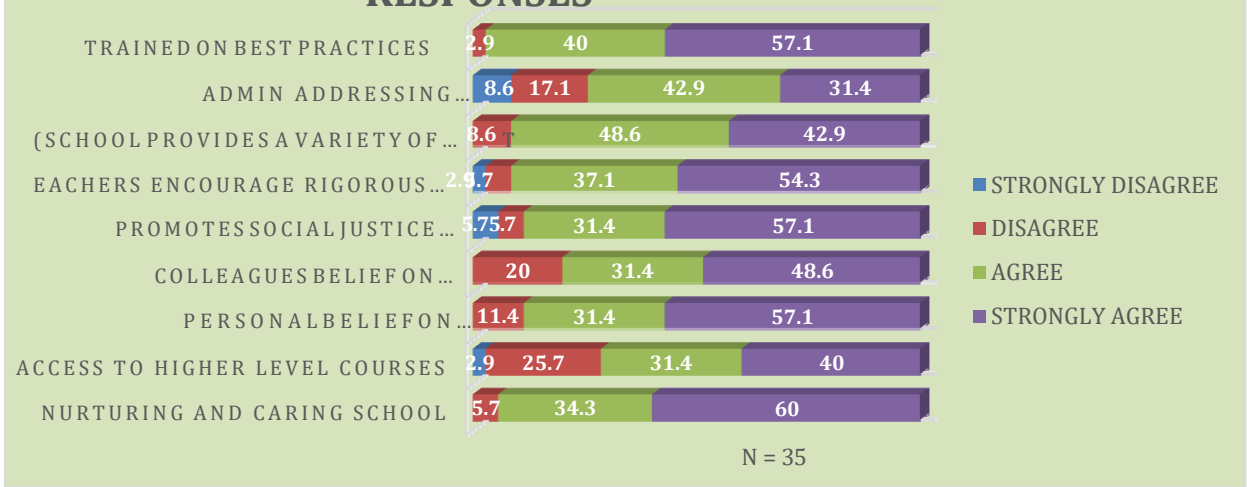
Additionally, scholars at Anywhere High School could further participate in activities and experiences with exposure experiences. For example, the school had an LGBTQ, Black Lives Matter, Robotics, and a host of other organizations. Scholars could participate in additional exposure opportunities, including dining at five-star restaurants, to learn etiquette techniques.

In addition, 86% of teachers viewed social justice orientation as a basis of their instructional practices. Nevertheless, where teachers perceived growth to be warranted is how the administration could address discipline issues concerns, with over 20% of the respondents disagreeing with how the administration could address those concerns. Yet only one teacher responded to the survey regarding what discipline issues were not being addressed when noting, "There are times I feel there is a difference in how some students are treated than others, nothing serious just inconsistencies among the administration." However, overall high expectations on the part of teachers and administrators were evident in responses.

Table 6  
*Teacher Responses Related to Research Question 2*

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## RESEARCH QUESTION 2 TEACHER RESPONSES



All stakeholders within this environment noted high expectations. The administration were often seeking ways to improve as well as teachers. Noted were high expectations regarding student achievement especially on standardized tests.

### **Outcomes-Based Teaching: SAT**

Administrators and educators mentioned the importance of scholars getting a good score on the national SAT exam. Several administrators noted that SAT achievement was something that is everyone's focus. Both administrators and teachers stated SAT data held teachers accountable. The school wanted to see growth on the SAT exam, and if that growth does not occur, the administration and teachers met to correct the issue. One strategy that is used is school-wide SAT prep exams occurring three to four times a year.

Similarly, due to the SAT exam having a writing component, the school's expectation was that all scholars were writing in every class daily. Lastly, the teachers used classroom data to develop additional learning strategies to close the learning gaps, working towards increased SAT scores. During this time, the Dean of Instructions



provided specific strategies they wanted a teacher to try. However, teachers also could develop and use their strategies, as long as they were effective.

Even though Anywhere High School has excellent matriculation from high school and into college, they had additional growth room. When speaking with department leads, various conversations surrounded that Anywhere High School had excellent college matriculation numbers, but they were still working to ensure they had higher college graduation numbers. Several teachers noted focus placed on teaching scholars how to study was a need within the classrooms.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

The school leadership prided itself on allowing the educators to be experts within the classroom. For example, the administrator stated, "Our school is unique and does not consist of a ton of instructional mandates." Teachers could be self-directed in the way they implemented their curriculum. Thus, the teaching staff tried to incorporate real-world topics so they could connect with their scholars. In the Advanced Placement course, especially history and Advanced Placement Language Arts, there were various social justice topics woven into the curriculum, including *The New Jim Crow*, *Just Mercy*, books centered around migrant workers, the government, and various other hot topics. Throughout the interviews and the survey, noted were references to culturally responsive teaching. One teacher noted she was always seeking ways to relate to her students in their world while still maintaining high expectations. Another teacher noted that by using relevant and meaningful materials for her students, she could reach and stretch their understandings. Since most of the teachers within this setting were Caucasian, and the students were African American or Latino, the need to continue using

culturally relevant materials was essential, and the administration was aware of this challenge.

### **Autonomy**

Additional data revealed classroom teachers and Deans of Instruction had genuine autonomy. As one teacher stated, "Anywhere High School does not have a ton of instructional mandates because they believe in autonomy." Therefore, if a Dean of Instruction had a particular strategy for the department to try, they could have teachers voluntarily implement the strategy. One example a teacher gave was in math courses; all teachers should use a common language across all classrooms, so students become familiar with various terms. Such standard practice was at the Deans' discretion and typically occurred in the core subjects. However, teachers at the school could utilize what they believed were their best practices and share their success and challenges in their bi-weekly department meetings. Examples of classroom autonomy were illustrated when educators were asked about their teaching strategies. Presented in Table 7 is a list of strategies and how frequently noted. From Table 7, the strategies represent a vast variety of instructional strategies and processes used in the classroom.

Table 7 *Teaching Strategies*

Teaching Strategies	Frequency Noted	Culturally Response
Frequent checks for understanding	32	yes
Incorporating critical thinking skills to develop free thinkers	34	yes
Independent study time	35	
Integrating music during lessons to keep scholars engaged	5	yes
Using classroom furniture to show their work on tables. *Pre-Covid-19	30	
Graphic organizers	32	
Journaling	15	yes
Scaffolding text-dependent questions and labs	10	
Learning about the scholars and then incorporating their experiences into the learning	25	yes
Allowing scholars to hear multiple perspectives	30	yes
Collaboration through activities like jigsaws	31	
Utilizing breakout rooms to increase engagement **During Covid-19	33	
Flipping the classroom	10	
A gradual release of responsibilities	31	
Socratic seminars	20	yes
Reading and reviewing in class	35	
Frequent opportunities for remediation	35	

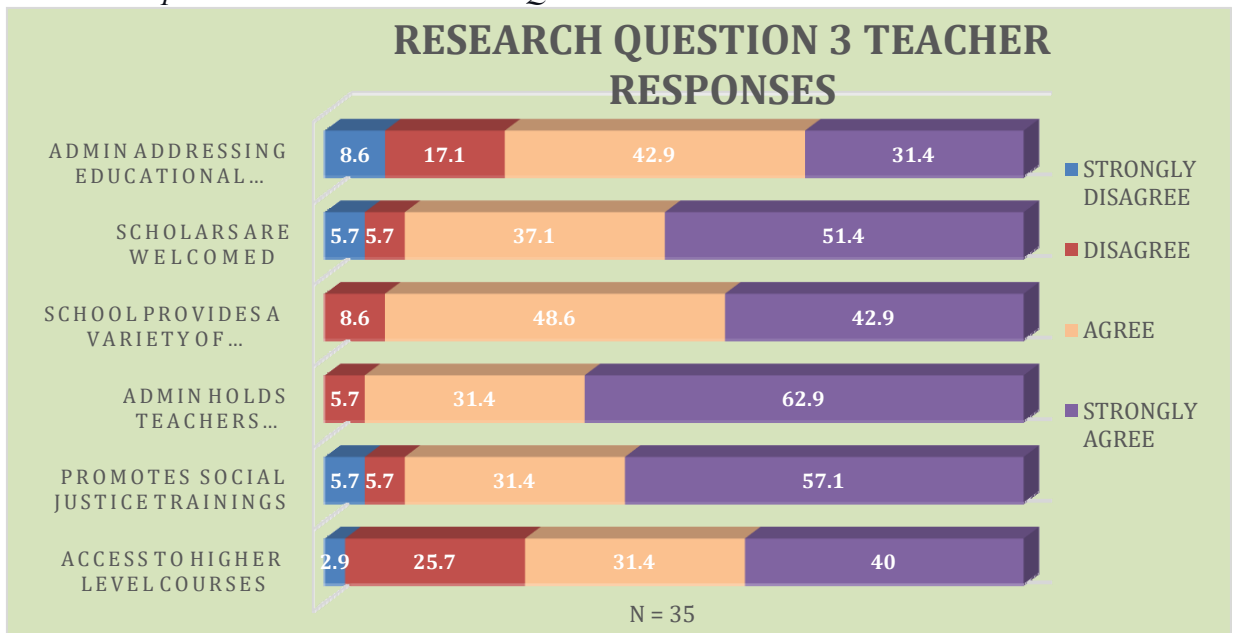
Note: N=35 teachers

### **Research Question Three**

*What accountability structures for teachers and principals are in place that creates a college readiness environment?*

Highlighted in Table 8 are the teachers' responses on accountability structures in place for teachers and principals. Discussed were various strategies of accountability structures.

Table 8  
*Teacher Responses Related to Research Question 3*



At Anywhere High School, staff, and educators' initial reaction when asked about college readiness was the SAT exam's reaction. More than 95% of respondents interviewed immediately went into details about the national SAT exam. One educator specifically stated the SAT had been a part of their daily work, and the school relied on the SAT to determine its success. Although the researcher chose Anywhere High School due to its Advanced Placement program, it became evident that the AP program was not necessarily the more critical college readiness factor. As a school with 100% of their high school graduates accepted into colleges, the documentation, staff survey, and administrative interviews revealed a significant amount of test prep around the SAT exam. Although scholars can have exposure to higher-level courses such as honors and Advanced Placement courses, the school's focus had been the SAT exam. Scholars took a practice SAT exam quarterly from their freshman until junior year of high school. The

school's average SAT score was currently around 1100. For all high schools 2020 graduates, the national average was 1051. Therefore, Anywhere High School had scholars achieving at rates higher than the national average. In prior years, the school district tied teacher bonuses to scholar's growth on the SAT exam. However, in recent years, removed was the bonus policy, and the additional funds were allocated to all teacher's salaries. When asked about this change, a teacher stated that they liked the change because it took the pressure from having the SAT as the driving force of their work. However, the high expectation for SAT scores supported the theme of outcome-based focus.

As the district continued to take an in-depth look at its practices, there was evidence that changes were coming. The 2020 convocation video refocusing on anti-bias practices noted the SAT is a racially biased exam. Similarly, when discussing the SAT with an administrator, the SAT was referenced as a "*dirty tool*" that is still a high lever within the school and district. Another school administrator stated that while the school had just received three emails about the SAT exams and its biased nature, a new policy was enacted late the 2020 school year that allowed scholars to choose to participate in SAT prep and no longer be mandatory effective immediately. Even while acknowledging this could negatively influence the school's overall state college readiness score, the majority of administrations believe it was the first step in actively combating social justice issues. Unfortunately, at the time of this research, the school and district did not have any immediate plan for how they would proceed. Instead, as they examined anti-bias anti-racist issues, they prioritized scholars' experiences over outcomes. This is a new way of thinking for school administrators and staff. One hundred percent of the school

administrators quantified that the school and district are moving in the right direction.

Yet, one administrator confirmed all the changes were overwhelming.

Furthermore, another administrator noted it was like a night and day experience with the changes, while other administrators mused it was hard to believe they were part of some of the prior policies negatively impacting scholars. As a result, they had done much reflecting on what it meant to be anti-bias and anti-racist and where they would go next in their school.

Similarly, the administrator stated that the school continues to examine its old policies and practices. Thus, the current anti-bias, anti-racist training shed light on policies and procedures that were once essential to the school's success and what needed to be done to quash systematic racism.

Other structures that existed in the school were structured feedback and informal observations system for teachers. Observed frequently were teachers, who were provided constructive feedback in a variety of ways. While all teachers expected to have at least one observation each semester, generally, the school's Dean of Instruction for their content area gave teachers frequent informal observations. Over 80% of administration interviewed stated they expected teachers to implement effective teaching strategies. As a teacher stated, "I have multiple data meetings throughout the year to discuss trends we noticed within our classroom grade books and students test scores in the interim."

However, an administrator stated that if a teacher implemented a strategy and it did not work, they could discontinue using it but not be penalized for being a risk-taker—another further example of teacher autonomy. Therefore, the structural expectation was to implement the strategy, provide feedback on if the strategy worked or not, and then

continue as the educator saw fit. Another teacher mentioned, "Deans of Instruction have the autonomy, and it is not a one size fits all. This is ever-evolving and has not always been that way". This was confirmed by another teacher who stated, "I had an issue with a task assigned to myself, and I wrote feedback and received support from my lead and principal." Ultimately, if the data or results showed growth, educators could determine their own best practices. What was expected is that each Dean of Instruction was to have bi-weekly one-on-one check-ins with their direct reports.

Upon interviewing school administrators, one administrator confirmed that the school did not mandate a school-wide observation tool. Instead, Deans of Instruction could give coaching to teachers in the needed areas. An example provided by several administrators was the use of aspects of the Charlotte Danielson Framework; however, they stated that they would not use that method on every teacher. Similarly, another administrator confirmed that the Deans of Instruction have autonomy in choosing how they coach teachers.

Another essential structure was a double loop feedback model. At times, the feedback from the bi-weekly meetings was formal, but the discussion between the feedback from the Dean and the teacher was informal. In a Covid-19 environment, each educator had an auditor who check was online to make sure scholars could easily access lessons for their asynchronous and synchronous learning. This audit ensured that scholars had similar online experiences.

While administrators had formal structures to give feedback, most teachers noted they also received feedback from their scholars. An anonymous survey was sent quarterly so scholars could evaluate their teachers. As one teacher noted, "Sometimes the feedback

can be disheartening if you have been putting in much work. However, it helps me improve as educators and ensure that their scholars are getting a great experience". Teachers were expected to implement the feedback given by their LaSalle was an after-school program for scholars to make-up missed assignments. This program was a mandate for the underclassman; however, the staff realized they wanted to allow the upperclassman to make good choices over the years. Therefore, a gradual release policy was set to prepare the upperclassmen for college independence; they did not mandate the LaSalle program at their level.

The data revealed a myriad of structures to hold both educators and scholars accountable for student success. They ranged from teacher observation systems to feedback structures for administrators, teachers, and scholars.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Creswell (2014) recommended consolidating and investigating all data to discover emergent themes. After analyzing various data sets from the quantitative data points and reviewing the qualitative data from surveys and interviews three themes were discovered. The three themes were becoming *anti-racist anti-bias, outcomes-results driven* and *autonomy for all with a united focus*.

### **Anti-Bias Anti-Racist**

After analyzing interviews, surveys, documentation, and this year's convocation video, it was clear they had a genuine renewed focus on becoming an anti-bias anti-racist organization at Anywhere High School. It was determined that this administrative team did display characteristics of social justice leadership. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) postulated that social justice leaders believe that all humans deserve equity, fairness in



social education, and economically. Overall, the data revealed that the administrative team displayed social justice orientation characteristics that focus on eliminating the marginalization of students of color. Specifically, the administrative team when faced with issues of racism disrupted those processes that promoted the marginalization and exclusion of groups as supported by findings identified by Theoharis (2007). The data displayed that this administrative team was actively working to develop new policies to combat their past issues. Equally, Theoharis (2007) stated that social justice leaders discover issues that interfere with achieving equity and address them with long-term strategies. Anywhere High School, along with the school district, identified issues with their policies and were actively revamping them. Although the school was within its infancy stages of planning, they identified an issue and were taking steps to provide a more equitable space for all scholars. Surveys, interviews, and various documentation showed the school was enthusiastically taken steps to become an anti-basis anti-racist organization. As Furman (2016) noted with a social justice leader, the primary concern is increasing equity across all areas for those affected. With the school re-emphasizing becoming an anti-basis anti-racist organization, this resulted in increasing equity. This was evidenced by its continued focus on open and honest dialogue with small group discussions, analysis of policies, and halting practices that created inequitable situations with scholars. In addition, the school started to send out information and resources to parents and community members on how to become anti-racist. Thus, the data revealed that when an organization has leadership that consistently demonstrates a social justice orientation, the focus of a school can be one that values equity for all.

Similarly, Northouse (2016) reported when social justice leaders act as change agents; they are carrying out transformative work by developing an anti-bias anti-racist amplified on marginalization, oppression, and exclusion (Martin & Miller, 2017). Consequently, as Shield (2010) recognized how the arrangement of power and practices in this school might favor some groups and are detrimental to others, the proactive approach is what makes these leaders demonstrative of social justice orientation as they seek to establish anti-bias anti-racist policies that all success for all scholars.

### **Outcome Results Driven**

The data focused on Anywhere High School scholar's success and making sure that scholars were able to matriculate to colleges across the nation. The social justice orientation of the leaders within this organization allowed them to minimize deficit thinking and avoid the marginalization of the minority (Martin & Miller, 2017). They demonstrated this strong outcome results driven focus when faced with incidences of racism by immediately conducting assessments of their policies and procedures to determine where to go next. As the Office of Social Justice (2016) reported, schools have promoted social justice by introducing and training teachers and changing educational policies whereby educators act in accordance with social justice principles. All of these strategies were based on the outcome results driven focus that both teachers and administrators emphasized as being narrowly defined at having students in AP courses and to achieve a SAT score higher than the state average. Both teachers and administrators were acting as transformation agents based on awareness by constructing and managing the outcome results driven by focusing with a new emphasizes on policies and procedures that would maximize the identified outcome results driven for this school.

Thus, a social justice orientation school continually works for a noticeable change in their schools (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

### **Autonomy for all with a Unified Focus**

At Anywhere High School, autonomy was a core value of the school. Autonomy viewed by schools' administrators and teachers was essential as long as the autonomy was focused on the identified outcome for the students. That focus was for most scholars to be in AP courses and for all students to have a high SAT score and continue postgraduate. Both the teachers and the administrators valued teachers' ability to make their own decisions within the classroom. This valuing of autonomy for teachers was part of the social orientation of the leaders. As Collins and Lenard (2014) proposed, social justice leaders, consider why and how schools are not meeting all students' needs and allow instruction to be modified accordingly. As within Anywhere High School, autonomy was highly valued as long as the scholar's outcomes are a success. Furthermore, as a social justice leader, it is essential to bring diverse perspectives to the table. Thus, allowing the teachers and Deans of Instruction to bring in their personal experiences and expertise allowed for autonomy regarding culturally relevant teaching and classroom experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Research has shown that scholars from the urban environment have lower rates of being in AP programs and matriculating into college. According to Park and Wimmer (2016), 26% of Black students, 26% of the Hispanic students, and the remaining 32% of white students' population applied for the AP program during 2014-2015. As noted, the Caucasian student population still dominates the pursuit of AP programs compared to other groups. To compare the students enrolled in the AP program, among all the

students who enroll, African-American and Hispanic students make up half the rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Gross, 2017). To overcome this barrier, Anywhere High School, located in the heart of Chicago, has proven to have strategies and structures that may benefit other schools. To begin understanding the successful outcomes, examining the leadership style of the administrative team was essential. It was determined that the teachers view the administrative team as demonstrating social justice orientation leadership. This social justice orientation was identified through characteristics of equity and focusing on diversity. Weaved throughout the characteristics discussed, the marginalization of minority groups (Callahan, 2006) was highlighted. Consequently, the social justice orientation of these leaders emphasized the minority group's experiences and inequalities in the outcomes of education and opportunities (Callahan, 2006). The data suggest that social justice orientation has proved to be the most potentially effective at eradicating these problems (Theoharis, 2007), and considers the aspects of focusing on the most underserved, underrepresented undereducated, and most oppressed groups.

Additionally, as social justice leaders seek to eliminate marginalization in schools (Northouse, 2016), they often identify the unjust and oppressive acts and replace them with those more equitable and culturally accepted (Bull, 2015) strategies, as was the case within this school setting. When these educators identify discriminatory policies with the potential of being racist, they began an investigation seeking solutions for issues that gave rise to inequalities within the school. It can be suggested that social justice leadership and a school with a social justice orientation can be successful in determining whether the students show signs of success and satisfaction in their schools. Consequently, schools' leadership is the best agent in spreading social justice in

educational settings that serve diverse students (Bull, 2015; Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).

### **Implications of Practice**

The implications of this inquiry for education practice affect school leaders and teachers in high school settings. The study findings indicate the need for principals and teachers to demonstrate social justice orientation characteristics to address diversity issues related to equity and social justice in their urban school settings to address achievement disparities between majority and minority populations. The findings supported the emphasis by Martin and Miller (2017), Marshall and Oliva (2010), and Theoharis (2007) of the need for principals and teachers to participate in training programs designed to build the capacities of social justice orientations within schools. Moreover, the training should be focused on educators' opportunities to reflect on how their attitudes, values, and experiences affect their behaviors are essential for educators in urban settings.

The study findings also suggested a need for educators to have the strategies and tools necessary to identify, challenge, and counteract discrimination and prejudice. In the literature review, Martin and Miller (2017) identified two reasonable strategies to use culture audits and equity audits. Culture audits help identify underlying organizational values and beliefs, and equity audits to identify racial disparities within programs and practices. Both strategies build a high school's capacity to develop a more comprehensive, thoughtful understanding of equity relationships within their high school. Therefore, schools trying to do social justice work should first take an internal audit of their policies to ensure that they do not have policies rooted in systematic racism.

## **Recommendations**

This study focused on school leadership, accountability structures, and teaching strategies of educators and administrators in a school that seems to be doing well, although they serve a high needs population from an urban environment. The following recommendations will be provided to the school via a presentation.

As a school that has taken a stance to become anti-basis anti-racist, one recommendation is to diversify the staff. Currently, the school student population is almost 90% Hispanic, followed by 9% African-American, but within their staff, that ethnicity breakdown is not seen. Breadson (2004) stated that leaders should create equitable schooling and educational systems. In doing so, it is essential to have diverse representation to assist in bringing a different perspective.

Anywhere High School is off to a great start of examining their educational practices through a social justice lens; however, they were still within the infancy stages. Therefore, they must continue to analyze their data and practices from over the past three to five years and see how policies have affected their scholars both directly and indirectly. For example, the opt-in vs. opt-out policy was created to help push scholars to take higher-level courses; however, it negatively impacts the minority subpopulations. Therefore, continuing to dive into their own personal practices needs to be a priority. Perhaps revamping the opt-in vs. opt-out policy. It is also crucial to have a parent development meeting to explain the importance of higher-level classes so that they can make the best decision for their scholar. According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leaders must disrupt activities that exclude groups of people. Therefore, the

administration at Anywhere High School should continue to develop themselves professionally in better understanding of systematic racism.

In addition to continuing with the anti-bias anti-racist training, it is recommended that the school create a streamlined approach to observations. Develop an instructional tool to measure teacher effectiveness regarding culturally relevant teaching and scholar experience. Although the school allows for autonomy in teaching, this observation tool should have a specific focus on social justice and equitable practices within the classroom. Therefore, teachers can choose how they like to implement their lessons, but the school administration would look for in-depth, culturally relevant topics, discussions, and scholar engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This inquiry examined an urban setting where the school focused on AP placement and creating students' pathways to post-graduate experiences. This study's conceptual framework was social justice, as the focus of this inquiry was equity. The guidance of social justice as a conceptual framework allowed the researcher to examine the school administration's leadership characteristics, the teaching practices, and accountability structures. The administrative team demonstrated the characteristics of social justice leadership, teachers utilized a variety of teaching strategies, and accountability for outcome results-driven existed in various structures.

## Executive Summary or Presentation



EXAMINING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY  
WITHIN ADVANCE PLACEMENT PROGRAMS  
USING THE LENS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Presented by Crystal Ward, Ed.D



### Research Questions

What social justice leadership characteristics are administrators practicing in an urban school with high minority student populations in advance placement programs?

What strategies and instructional practices are teachers using in an urban school with high minority student populations in advance placement programs?

What accountability structures for teachers and principals are in place that creates a college readiness environment?



# Themes

- Autonomy
- Anti-Bias Anti-Racist (ABAR)
- Results-Driven

01

Diversify the staff within the building so that it is more reflective of the scholar's demographic breakdown.

02

Continue anti-bias professional development systematic change.

03

Develop an instructional content process for teaching.

Recommendations

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP**

The target journal selected for article submission is *Urban Education*. The selection of the journal was due to its focus on critical issues facing inner-city schools (Urban Education, 2019). In addition, the journal has eight interdisciplinary focus areas:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Counseling and Social Services
- Education Policy
- Equity in Urban Education
- Leadership
- Psychology and Human Development
- Special Education
- Teacher Education

Manuscripts should be submitted online. Papers should not exceed 11,000 words, including references, abstracts, and table figures and should follow the American Psychological Associations (APA) format. (Urban Education, 2020).

### **Submission Information**

Attached you will find a manuscript for review for the upcoming issue of *Urban Education*. The attached article aligns your journals focus on equity in urban education, and leadership. Your journal helps to educate professionals that serve our highest needs youth. I have reviewed your submission guides and I want to guarantee that this manuscript could provide educational benefits to your demographic.

This submission contains an analysis of a mixed-method study of a charter school in Chicago, Illinois. The school is located in the heart of the urban core, where crime and high dropout rates are a form of normalcy. This mixed-method study was conducted using interviews, staff surveys, school data, and an analysis of policy. This submission adheres to APA guidelines including margins, page length, and word count. Please note, this article is not under consideration for any other journal.

As the author's background experiences is in secondary school administration. I have more than 15 years of professional experience working with urban school environments. Currently, I work full-time with the largest charter network of schools in north Texas. My professional goal is to continue to make an impact and transform the face of education.

Humbly,

Crystal Ward, Ed.D

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## **Title**

Examining Equity and Opportunity Within Advanced Placement Programs Using the Lens of Social Justice

## **Abstract**

Using the social justice lens, this study aimed to provide clarity on the impact of leadership on college readiness in an urban school environment. This researcher investigated what leadership characteristics, accountability practices and what teachers and leaders within an urban school in Chicago are doing to increase college readiness for their minority population. Also, the researcher examined the impact that leadership has on college readiness programs including the Advanced Placement program within the school. While the findings were inconsistent, the tenets of social justice premediated the ethos of this setting and established that equity can occur with vision and fortitude. The implications for practice for all high schools are important.

## **Introduction**

Throughout the history of America, minority students' achievement has fallen behind their White counterparts. A 2016 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reported, by the twelfth grade, the White-Black achievement gap in reading was 30 points in 2013, increasing only six points since 1992. Similarly, in the fourth grade, the White-Black achievement gap in mathematics went from 32 points in 1990 to 26 points in 2013 (p. 5). While these differences in achievement have continued in the early years of education, those same gaps exist in the post-secondary school setting as well. For example, during 2013, the total college enrollment rate for White 18 to 24 year-olds was

42 percent while the rates for their Black and Hispanic peers remained at 34 percent (p. 5).

As the college readiness gaps widen, minority students who fall behind have fewer chances of excelling at the collegiate level, ultimately affecting a student's access to career and attaining finances to support themselves. Abel and Dietz (2014) further noted the financial benefits of a college education still outweigh the expenses as they emphasized that workers with bachelor's degrees earned 56 percent more than workers with only a high school diploma. Consequently, this study examined how an urban high school with a focus on Advanced Placement (AP) classes is effectively preparing minority students, specifically African American and Hispanic students for post-secondary education so that they successfully attain a college degree.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educational attainment is one of the best ways for a person to ensure that they will have a stable future. Unfortunately, post-secondary education attendance and retention data look drastically different for various groups of people depending on their demographics. Harper (2008) revealed alarming statistics for low-income, first generation college students. Abel and Deitz (2014) showed there are economic benefits and personal development benefits for students that can attain college degrees, including earning 56% more than a counterpart with a high school diploma. Similarly, research by Pfeiffer (2014) disclosed that students who attend college enhance their communication skills, gain independence, confidence, and develop grit. If the research is correct, then preparing students to be college-ready should be something that every child in the United States should have access to regardless of race or their socioeconomic background.

Some secondary schools can provide students with access to higher-level courses and college access while in high school. Some options, including AP (College Board, 2020), dual enrollment, and early college and International Baccalaureate courses, are options that schools may provide (International Baccalaureate & College Board, 2020).

According to Best Value Schools (2020), over 1,400 schools within the United States participate in the AP Program, whereas only around 800 schools engage with the International Baccalaureate Program. While some schools have the opportunity to provide higher-level courses that expose students to college curriculum and rigor, the student enrollment in those courses do not always mirror the school's enrollment (College Board, 2020). Enrollment in these courses tend to be populated by Caucasian students, while their minority counterparts are taking lower-level classes. As a result, the International Baccalaureate program has launched a program entitled Bridging the Equity Gap program (International Baccalaureate, 2020). A new census population projection revealed that minority America would become the majority in the year 2045 (Frey, 2018). To that point, the College Board has compared the ethnicity demographic percentage of the class of 2017 with the ethnicity demographic percentage breakdown of AP takers that scored three or higher in the class of 2017 (The College Board, 2018). In the comparison, the College Boards reported Caucasian students made up 56.3% of the graduating classes during the year of 2017. Similarly, they made up 55.6% of the AP exam takers that earned a score of three or higher. Conversely, African- American students made up 14.4%, and Hispanic scholars made up 22.4% of the graduating class of 2017. However, African Americans scoring a three or higher on the AP exam were at 4.3%, and Hispanic scholars were at 22.9% (College Board, 2018). Therefore, the researcher wanted to

investigate the social justice leadership characteristics, accountability structures, and teacher behaviors that increase access for minority scholars and economically disadvantaged scholars within these higher-level courses as well as the impact of such characteristics, structures and behaviors on minority student success.

## **Scholarly Review**

### **Leadership Framework**

To enhance the opportunity of students, specifically in the AP program, needed is a leader dedicated to reaching out to all communities and providing them with the resources, they need to achieve the same levels of success as their counterparts. Several types of leadership styles could potentially remedy this issue, but some may be more effective than others may. Examined within the scope of this inquiry were the following leadership theories: Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), Transformational Leadership (Burns, 2003), and Social Justice Leadership (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

### **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf first suggested servant leadership in 1970 (Northouse, 2016, p. 224) point out that a different concept, servant leadership, truly exemplifies the adage “to lead, one must serve.” As Northouse explained, servant leadership emphasizes followers. A strong servant leader will “put followers first, empower them, and help develop their full personal capacities” (Northouse 2016, p. 225). These leaders display a strong sense of altruism and morality (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). In his original writing, *The Servant as a Leader* (1970), Greenleaf affirmed:

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in



the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p.4)

Applying this description to the context of equity in the Advanced Placement program, a servant leader could be a strong candidate for initiating change in the demographics of the program and providing more students of color with the opportunity to be involved. According to the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1970), this type of person would be very receptive and actively try to improve the experiences of those involved in their program. They have ideal qualifications for a professional in the field of education as their values directly align with many educators, who strive to inspire in their students: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Ebbrecht & Martin, 2017; Northouse, 2016, p. 227-229). These traits also are characteristics of an exemplary leader who demonstrate a genuine investment in the lives and education of the students with whom they interact. Patterson (2003), labeled such leadership is "agape love," an unconditional, unparalleled caring for another.

Wheeler (2012) explored the concept of servant leadership in settings involving administrators, educators, and students. Using Greenleaf's (1970) definition of a servant leader as a model, he identified ten characteristics and principles of this leadership style. He first stated that a servant leader could easily be mistaken as being pretentious or perhaps condescending. Wheeler challenged the reader by addressing "the question of whether we are willing to accept the consequences of our actions. For example, if we

[educators] are strong moral leaders, our actions will no doubt be seen by some as suggesting righteousness or a holier-than-thou attitude” (2012, p. 27). These leadership principles align with Northouse’s (2016) characteristics, of a true servant leader. A key value of Wheeler’s (2012) argument that many leadership theories do not offer the opportunity for self-reflection- an action taken by a true servant leader. Exploring these same concepts of Greenleaf’s (1970) work, Frick (2004) further analyzed servant leadership by breaking down the word “leadership,” as so many other texts only define a “servant.” He affirmed the following in the foreword of his book *Robert K. Greenleaf A Life of Servant Leadership* (2004):

Much of what is written today on the subject focuses on power, either explicitly or implicitly. This occurs because leadership has, in its colloquial use, become a synonym for “boss-ship”- as when we use the word “leader” to refer to a person in the position of greatest authority. This is tragic and undermines progress in developing real leadership. If the word “leader” is a mere synonym for boss or positional authority, it has no meaning at all... Moreover, being a boss hardly guarantees being a leader. Many occupy positions of great authority and contribute little leadership. (Frick, 2004, p. IX-X)

This critical analysis is essential as it dissects the entirety of the nature of servant leadership, further confirming that the character of a true servant leader in an educational setting, is always modeling the behaviors and values to those one is aiming to impress, the students (Frick, 2004; Greenleaf, 1970).

In another study Paris and Peachey (2013), explained the practical value of servant leadership (pg. 384-386). Some of the key points include the proven effectiveness

of a servant leader in the following categories: Cross-Cultural Applicability, Team Level Effectiveness, and Followers' Well Being. These conclusions were from studies done by scholars, such as Patterson (2003), as well as research done by Joseph and Winston (2005). Joseph and Winston's (2005) identified the element of trust as a topic needing further elaboration. "Trust and respect are the highest in circumstances where a community is created through service in which the liability of "each for each other" and "all for one" is unlimited (Joseph & Winston, 2005, p.11). This conceptualization explored the "institutional trust" that is necessary with a servant leader (Joseph & Winston, 2005, p. 11). Consequently, an entire environment of ethics, empathy, and healing is required for the servant leader to be effective.

While the ideal and practice of servant leadership are admirable, it comes with challenges. "Unlike other leadership theories which are defined by the *actions* of the leader, servant leadership relates to the *character* who has a heart for serving and ministering to the needs of others" (Lee & Jackson, 2017, p. 276). Consequently, for servant leadership to be highly effective, ingrained in the foundation must be the formal and informal organizational values of equity. However, since the concept of servant-leadership appears to be so multi-dimensional, it is difficult to measure (Lee & Jackson, 2017).

Additionally, often servant leaders are viewed as weak leaders, as they are perceived as followers (Northouse, 2016). The concern of care towards the group is seen as a failure to make decisions or placing too much time on human resources instead of the organization's goals. Risks for the organization could be that production and goals may not be at the forefront (Northouse, 2016). Thus, due to the stated purpose of this study,

with the focus on the leader and not the follower, eliminated as a conceptual framework was this leadership theory.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Another leadership theory potentially suitable for creating change is transformational leadership (Burns, 2003). This style of leadership has similar qualities to servant leadership (Northouse, 2016). In this style, like servant leadership, the leader puts the needs of the group before their own (Fassinger, Buki, Shulman, Varghese, Nolan, Bihm, & Rasheed, 2017; Northouse). A transformational leader highly values one's followers and possesses a strong appreciation for humanity and justice (Burns, 2003; Northouse).

As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2016). It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals and includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. As argued by Northouse, "[It] moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership." (p. 175-176) Attributed to some of the people with the most significant historical impacts recorded is this leadership style. Leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (McGuire & Hutchings, 2007), Gandhi (Fassinger, Buki, Shulman, Varghese, Nolan, Bihm, & Rasheed, 2017), and the current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatzo (Bentz, 2012), have all exhibited transformational leadership traits.

Despite the similarities noted between transformational and servant leadership, there are key differences that distinguish the two (Northouse, 2016). While their

approaches towards directing their followers are similar, their attitudes make a profound difference. When discussing transformational leadership, Avolio (1999) characterized it as perhaps “anti-democratic.” When putting transformational and servant leadership side-by-side, a servant leader will genuinely serve their follower’s wishes. In contrast, a transformational leader will make one’s vision known and then attempt to transform followers to complete the same goal (Northouse, 2016). Northouse further explained that transformational leaders could be viewed as putting their needs and their goals above others, despite their high altruistic tendencies. He also pointed out “followers can influence leaders just as leaders can influence followers” (2016, p. 193). A transformational leader will have strengths in motivating and inspiring change in one’s followers whether they be administrative, educational, or students. Nevertheless, they will have a difficult time suiting the program to fit the people involved, rather than their personal needs. Stump (2016) acknowledged the “four I’s” of transformational leadership as “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (pg. 42-43).

Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership can take a person beyond their self-interest through these four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Stump, 2016). The followers’ self-awareness, maturity, self-actualization, and concern for the well-being of others increases while under transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Idealized influence is realized when, “the leader envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, sets an example to be followed, sets high standards of

performance, and shows determination and confidence” (Bass, 1999, p. 11) by being influential through ideals. The ideals and the leader inspire followers to go beyond themselves and dedicate themselves to a movement or mission. One example of this is choosing to join the military to serve one’s country (Bass, 1999).

Inspirational motivation was created and separated from charismatic leadership because it is believed that one can still be inspiring “through the use of simple words, slogans, symbols, and metaphors” without necessarily being charismatic (Bass, 1999, p. 214). Identifying with charisma in a leader is not necessary to understand the importance of a mission. Regardless, leaders can instill confidence and motivate their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993), by articulating and communicating a clear vision and detailing a clear plan.

Displayed Intellectual stimulation occurs when “the leader helps followers to become more innovative and creative” (Iyigun, 2019, p. 281). Leaders need to involve their followers in the decision-making process. Doing so allows followers to get creative and innovative in identifying solutions to problems. During the process, the leader gathers ideas from their followers without criticizing their followers’ efforts. Instead, the leader helps them think through the problem and their ideas by steering them in the right direction through conversation and framing problems (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Individualized consideration is when “leaders pay attention to the developmental needs of followers and support and coach the development of their followers” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). On a simple level, it is the leader treating their followers as individuals instead of treating them as a collective.

While the components of transformational leadership are essential in a changing organization (Bass, 2009; Bass & Avolio, 1993), it is not necessarily a good fit for an established organization. For that reason, transformational leadership was not used as the conceptual framework.

### **Social Justice Leadership**

To understand the principles of social justice theory, it is essential to understand what social justice is and is not. Theoharis (2007) explained that social justice is “disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote the marginalization and exclusionary process” (p. 223). As a social justice leader, the primary concern is increasing equity across all areas for those affected (Furman, 2016). Perhaps a combination of all of the different types of effective, follower-based leadership models (Marshal & Olivia, 2010) previously discussed, this leader can provide a democratic environment, serve as a figure for the head of the organization, and understand the systems that perpetuate inequality. All of this is because the social justice leader displays extraordinary levels of empathy. This person will go beyond the confines of being a “good leader,” and will inspire change, hope, morality, ethics, and justice in their followers (Theoharis, 2007). As explained by Furman (2016), this type of leadership should be the standard in any educational setting. With the rapid changes in the demographic of a school population, the safety and success of students should be the top priority for any educator (Furman). As a theory, social justice leadership research is still limited on how the theory should be appropriately practiced (Furman 2016; Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017; Theoharis, 2007).

While servant (Greenleaf, 1970) and transformational (Burns, 2003) leaders both have a strong desire to care for others and exemplify a robust moral code and inspire change for their followers, the social justice leader wants all of these things for everyone, follower or not (Northouse, 2016). The very concept of social justice implies equality for society, and the social justice leader's goal is to provide opportunities for those who may have previously not been able to afford them (Furman, 2016), resulting in alignment with the purpose of this inquiry.

### **Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

Various scholars have defined social justice leadership in different ways. Scholars like Marshal and Olivia (2010) defined social justice as processes and structures developed to disrupt and transform conditions that would cause marginalization and exclusion. Zaid (2010) noted social justice referred to the process of altering provisions set by the institutions and organizations, by regularly engaging in regaining, appropriating, nourishing, and evolving essential human rights, fairness, equity, equality, socio-economic, educational, and personal dimensions. Theoharis (2007) argued social justice leadership exists when the head of schools makes subjects of gender, race, disability, color, class, sex, historical, and currently sidelining factors that are essential to the advocacies of America important aspects of their work. He goes on to note such leaders come up with policies and resource allocation not for raising test scores, but for the benefit of a given selected group based on race, socioeconomic, language, gender, or other social inequalities. Moreover, Collins and Lenard (2014) postulated that social justice leaders take into consideration the reason why and how schools are not meeting the needs of all students. They further formulate the role that the schools and principals



can play in rebuilding social order. Such leaders (Collins & Lenard; Martin & Miller, 2017) are vital in urban contexts due to the factors of the setting that are complex and relating to immigration and race, poverty and language barriers, and other issues that are predominantly severe.

Social justice leaders act as change agents that are involved in leadership that transforms (Northouse, 2016). Therefore, for them to carry out the transformative work, they first need to develop an awareness that is heightened on marginalization, oppression, and exclusion (Martin & Miller, 2017). Consequently, they must understand and recognize how the arrangement of power and practices in institutions favor some groups and detriment others (Shield, 2010). Educators can act as transformation agents based on awareness by constructing and managing new possibilities of social justice in their respective schools. Thus, a social justice leader is an activist and continually works for a noticeable change in their schools (Marshal & Olivia, 2010). Furthermore, for the social justice leaders in schools to function as transformative agents for change in challenging contexts, the leaders must show a high level of commitment to the social justice agenda and embrace such efforts persistently (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017). In addition, for the educational leaders to address social justice and marginalization issues (Northouse, 2016) they must work in creating inclusive practices in the institution of learning. Notably, their caring relationship should be based on authentic communication, and their relationships should be holistic and morally grounded (Marshal & Olivia, 2010). Therefore, the dialogue is a key notion in situations of diversity and is beneficial in including the marginalized groups meaningfully in cultural institutions such as schools. Importantly, leaders should be more engaged in self-evaluation and critically

audit themselves to enable growth and embrace quality social justice leadership (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).

Research by Marshal and Olivia (2010) on social justice leadership has shown there has been a significant rise in the promotion of the concept of social justice leadership. As a result, there has been a growing collection of literature used in the analysis of social justice leadership (Kathleen, 2004). Ranging from the empirical analyses of the difficulties experienced by the social justice leaders (Northouse, 2016) to conceptual opinions of preparation programs for leadership that focuses on contemplations of social justice (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).

Rosa (2014) postulated social justice preparation for educational leaders has the capability of organizing around a set of skills. The first such skill is identifying, challenging, and counteracting preconceptions and discrimination (Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017). The second, fostering a norm of high prospects in the facilities and all the students. The third is facilitating the structuring of a rigorous curriculum that is diverse and comprehensive. The next skill is supporting the development of practices that are just in the social context of the entire field of education. Finally, developing communities that are education-focused; and sustaining an extensive commitment to unqualified equity (Rosa, 2014).

Several barriers to social justice leadership exist (Scheurich, 2004). These barriers include policies at the local and national level that are against social justice and equity. Another barrier is valuing leadership that is technically based rather than morally based. This could lead to deficit thinking and marginalization of the minority who does not have technical expertise (Martin & Miller, 2017). These barriers have derailed the

implementation of social justice in schools. To enhance these barriers, bureaucratic and market structures have disrupted the democratic attempts in schools (Scheurich, 2004).

### **Methods**

The design paradigm used to guide this inquiry was pragmatism as a worldview. Creswell (2014) argued that pragmatism “arises out of actions, situations, and consequences” (p. 10). Because pragmatism emphasizes the use of many perspectives (Creswell), the methodology selected was a mixed-method research design. This design provided an enhanced understanding of the problem of underrepresented minorities in Advanced Placement (AP) programs by using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred concurrently, consistent with the principles of the mixed-method design. Additionally, using mixed methods assisted the researcher in triangulating the data (Creswell). Similarly to the beliefs of Creswell (2014), the researcher wanted to concurrently analyze both the qualitative and quantitative data sets to provide clarification of what leadership and teaching behaviors were occurring in this setting that contributed to minority student success in AP programs.

Likewise, using a case study approach, the researcher researched one high school from the Noble Network of Schools in Chicago, Illinois. The use of a qualitative case study approach provided opportunity for in-depth responses and richer feedback (Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, as Creswell (2014) explained, “We want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between the researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 42). To this end, the researcher chose one case study using a mixed design approach.

## **Findings**

Creswell (2014) recommended consolidating and investigating all data to discover emergent themes. After analyzing various data sets from the quantitative data points and reviewing the qualitative data from surveys and interviews three themes were discovered. The three themes were becoming *anti-racist anti-bias, outcomes results driven* and *autonomy for all with a united focus*.

### **Anti-Bias Anti-Racist**

After analyzing interviews, surveys, documentation, and this year's convocation video, it was clear that they have a genuine renewed focus on becoming an anti-bias anti-racist organization at Anywhere High School. It has been determined that this administrative team does display characteristics of social justice leadership. As postulated by, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) who stated social justice leaders believe that all humans deserve equity, fairness in social education, and economically. Overall, the data revealed that the administrative team displayed social justice orientation characteristics that focus on eliminating the marginalization of students of color. Specifically, the administrative team when faced with issues of racism they disrupted those processes that promoted the marginalization and exclusion of groups as supported by findings identified by Theoharis (2007). The data displays that this administrative team is actively working to develop new policies to combat their past issues. Equally, Theoharis (2007) stated social justice leaders discover issues that interfere with achieving equity and address them with long-term strategies. Anywhere High School, along with the school district, have identified issues with their policies and are actively revamping them immediately. Although the school is within its infancy stages of planning, they have identified an issue

and are taking steps to provide a more equitable space for all scholars. Surveys, interviews, and various documentation have shown that the school is enthusiastically taken steps to become an anti-bias anti-racist organization. As Furman (2016) noted with a social justice leader, the primary concern is increasing equity across all areas for those affected. With the school, re-emphasizing becoming an anti-bias anti-racist organization this results in increasing equity. This is evidenced by its continued focus on open and honest dialogue with their small group discussions, analysis of policies, and halting practices that created inequitable situations with scholars. In addition, the school has now started to send out information and resources to parents and community members on how to become anti-racist. Thus, the data reveals that when an organization has leadership that demonstrates consistently a social justice orientation the focus of a school can be one that values equity for all.

Similarly, Northouse (2016) reported when social justice leaders act as change agents they are carrying out transformative work, by developing an anti-bias anti-racist amplified on marginalization, oppression, and exclusion (Martin & Miller, 2017). Consequently, as Shield (2010) recognized how the arrangement of power and practices in this school might favor some groups and are detrimental to others, the proactive approach is what makes these leaders demonstrative of social justice orientation as they seek to establish anti-bias anti-racist policies that all success for all scholars.

### **Outcome Results Driven**

The data focused on Anywhere High School scholar's success and making sure that scholars are able to matriculate to colleges across the nation. The social justice

orientation of the leaders within this organization have allowed them to minimize deficit thinking and avoid the marginalization of the minority (Martin & Miller, 2017). They have demonstrated this strong outcome results driven focus when faced with incidences of racism they immediately did assessments of their policies and procedures to determine where to go next. As the Office of Social Justice (2016), reported schools have promoted social justice by introducing and training teachers and changing educational policies whereby educators act in accordance with social justice principles. All of these strategies are based on the outcome results driven focus that both teachers and administrators emphasized as being narrowly defined at having students in AP courses and to achieve a SAT score higher than the state average. Both teachers and administrators are acting as transformation agents based on awareness by constructing and managing the outcome results driven by focusing with a new emphasizes on policies and procedures that will maximize the identified outcome results driven for this school. Thus, a social justice orientation school continually works for a noticeable change in their schools (Marshal & Olivia, 2010).

### **Autonomy for all with a Unified Focus**

At Anywhere High School, autonomy is a core value of the school. Autonomy viewed by schools' administrators and teachers is important as long as the autonomy is focus on the identified outcome for the students. That focus is for the majority of scholars to be in AP courses and for all students to have a high SAT score and continue postgraduate. The ability for teachers to make own decisions within the classroom is valued by both the teachers and the administrators. This valuing of autonomy for teachers is part of the social orientation of the leaders. As Collins and Lenard (2014)

proposed social justice leaders take into consideration the reason why and how schools are not meeting the needs of all students, and allow instruction to be modified accordingly. As within Anywhere High School, autonomy is highly valued as long as the outcomes for the scholar are success. Furthermore, as a social justice leader it is important to bring diverse perspectives to the table. Thus, allowing the teachers and Deans of Instruction to bring in their own personal experiences and expertise allows for autonomy regarding culturally relevant teaching and classroom experiences.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Research has shown that scholars from the urban environment have lower rates of being in AP programs and matriculating into college. According to Park and Wimmer (2016), indicated 26% of Black students, 26% of the Hispanic students and the remaining 32% of white students' population applied for the AP program during the academic year 2014-2015. As noted, Caucasian student population still dominates the pursuit of AP programs compared to other groups. To compare the students enrolled in the AP program, among all the students that enroll, African-American and Hispanic students make up half the rate compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Gross, 2017). To overcome this barrier Anywhere High School, located in the heart of Chicago has proven to have strategies and structures that may benefit other schools. To begin understanding the successful outcomes, examining the leadership style of the administrative team was essential. It was determined that the teachers view they administrative team as demonstrating social justice orientation leadership. This social justice orientation was identified through characteristics of equity and focusing on diversity. Weaved throughout the characteristics discussed, the marginalization of minority groups

(Callahan, 2006) was highlighted. Consequently, the social justice orientation of these leaders placed emphasis on the minority group's experiences and inequalities in the outcomes of education and opportunities (Callahan, 2006). The data suggests that through the use of social justice orientation has proved to be the most potentially effective at eradicating these problems (Theoharis, 2007), and considers the aspects of focusing on the most underserved, underrepresented, and undereducated and mostly oppressed groups.

Additionally, as social justice leaders seeks to eliminate marginalization in schools (Northouse, 2016) they are often identifying the unjust and oppressive acts and replacing them with those more equitable and culturally accepted (Bull, 2015) strategies as was the case within this school setting. When these educators identify policies that were bias with a potential of being racist they began an investigation seeking solutions for issues that gave rise to inequalities within the school. It can be suggested that social justice leadership and a school with a social justice orientation can be successful in determining whether the students show signs of success and satisfaction in their schools. Consequently, leadership in schools is the best agent in spreading social justice in educational settings that serve diverse students (Bull, 2015; Marshal & Olivia, 2010; Martin & Miller, 2017).



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## **CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTION**

## **Scholarly Practitioner Reflection**

Before even applying to this program, I struggled with doubting if I was good enough to receive this degree. For several years, my professor had encouraged me to apply; she reasoned that we needed more black women in education with Doctoral degrees. At the time, I had just started my work as a high school principal while living in Kansas City, Mo. Another principal and a good friend encouraged me to apply for the program. I was excited to think about the opportunity of earning my doctorate, and I wanted to be a good role model for the students that I served. However, I had tremendous doubts that I could ever get into the program. So, I secretly decided to apply and never mentioned it to my colleague. To my surprise, I received a letter to continue in the process and eventually join my cohort.

I began my doctoral program in the summer of 2013. I have always been a great student with in-person classes, so I enjoyed this program's setup. I enjoyed having lessons on the campus of the University of Missouri. It made me feel like I was part of the bigger picture. Although the summer courses were long, I appreciated the diversity of having small group work and discussions. In the evenings, I had the opportunity to network with others from all over the state. During my coursework in the fall and spring semester, Dr. Martin would present our curriculum in unique ways that stretched our thinking. She would always challenge our thoughts and stretch our thinking.

Throughout this process, I went against the recommendation of my advisor and switched jobs a few times. Everyone told me that it is vital to reduce the amount of change while in the program, and they were right. Unfortunately, my vision and values did not align with the school district, where I was serving as principal, so I left. Although

I could start a new school administrative job, my immediate family moved to Dallas, Texas. Thus, prompting me to want to get away and start a new life in a different city. Therefore, I left Kansas City in 2016 and landed in Dallas, Texas. During this time, priorities began to shift. Since I finished my written and oral comps, I had more free time. Instead of studying, I wanted to enjoy my new city and the travel that my new job afforded me. I put the dissertation on the back burner. It was no longer critical because, at this point, I was not working in a school. So, I did not feel the need to have the highest degree possible. Instead, I worked for a nonprofit organization that emphasized ensuring that high school students had access to higher-level courses. This job allowed me to work with school districts in Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Oakland school districts. Because of this, I traveled the USA and learned about different school districts and how they operated. During this time, I stumbled upon a network of schools defying the odds with their college readiness indicators. More importantly, I met the school's current principal I researched and had the opportunity to see the impact of his leadership.

In all honesty, this doctoral process has been the longest and most challenging for me. There were so many days I wanted to quit and drop out. However, I knew that quitting was not an option even when I no longer felt that I needed the degree. I made a promise to my mother, and that kept me motivated. This process has pushed me to my limits and helped me to realize a lot about myself. I have learned that I need to be given deadlines. I do not like to be late or feel like I am not doing what I need to do. So, although my professor had told us that we needed to keep working once classes finished, I did not listen. Since starting this program, I have switched jobs and moved to another

state. This created a lack of focus, and I did the exact opposite of what my professor had advised.

Although I lost focus, I believe that everything works together for the greater good because so much has happened within the United States since I started this process. There has been a shift, and people have begun to see the importance of minorities having equitable experiences. The Black Lives Matter movement has shed light on injustices within a variety of systems. Thus, focusing these systems on being reflective in their practices. The district that I researched has made it a priority to dig deep and look at policies and procedures that have impacted their scholars. This time has also allowed me to reflect on my own experiences, especially my educational sector experiences. There have been times where stood for what was right and have been reprimanded standing on my beliefs. The Black Lives Matter movement also has me questioning how often I have not spoken up for a policy that I disagreed with that may be rooted in systematic racism. I do believe that the current state of the political climate within the United States impacted my research. However, I also feel that it shows that schools that genuinely are trying to do right by children still have room for growth. Had I finished my research earlier in my process, I believe that the outcome would have looked different, but I am grateful that this network and others that are impacting significantly positive changes for the scholars they serve.

During all my life's challenges, I knew it was vital for me to buckle down and finish the doctoral process. Therefore, I got refocused and learned to persevere. While pushing myself to finish, I accepted a promotion within my school district. Meaning, at the final stretch, I started a new job. However, at this point, I knew I had to finish and



finish strong. So, I had to let everything else go. I eliminated most activities from my schedule and focused on getting the dissertation done. Although I had some long nights of crying and frustrations, I made it! The feeling of getting to the finish line is unexplainable. I am also proud because I know that my research will significantly impact the charter world and schools within the United States.

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## Appendix A

### Gatekeeper Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation Letter

Dear <name>,

I would like to request your permission to invite applicable educators in your program to participate in a research study entitled: *Examining Equity and Opportunity Within Advance Placement Programs Using The Lens of Social Justice*, I am examining school leadership and its impact on student's preparation for college readiness. The information gathered should be beneficial to other school leaders that desire to impact a college readiness culture for students from urban environments. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For the study, the high school administrative team will be asked to complete a 60-minute interview and teachers within their building will be sent an electronic survey that should take about 20 minutes. No personal or identifying information will be collected from these educators. I am seeking your permission as the district representative to contact the administrators and educators at the high school for their participation in this study. A copy of the interview protocol, teacher survey, and informed consent forms are attached for your review.

Participation in the study is voluntary. The participants may withdraw from participation at any time they wish without penalty, including in the middle of or after completion of the interview. Participants' answers will remain confidential, anonymous, and separate from any identifying information. The researcher will not list any names of participants in her dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation either by phone at (816) 548-0676 or by electronic mail at [crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu](mailto:crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu). In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara Martin, who can be reached at 660-543-8823 or by email at [bmartin@ucmo.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucmo.edu).

If you choose to allow me to contact administrators and educators regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. You should retain a copy of this letter and your written consent for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Crystal Ward  
Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix B: IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board**  
**University of Missouri-Columbia**  
FWA Number: 00002876  
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211  
573-882-3181  
irb@missouri.edu

May 29, 2020

Principal Investigator: Crystal R. Ward (MU-Student)  
Department: Educational Leadership-EDD

Your IRB Application to project entitled EXAMINING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY WITHIN ADVANCE PLACEMENT PROGRAMS USING THE LENSE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2023951
IRB Review Number	265654
Initial Application Approval Date	May 29, 2020
IRB Expiration Date	May 29, 2021
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(1)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Approved Documents	Admin interview questions with the consent. Teacher survey questions with consent.

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

### 1. COVID-19 Specific Information

Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at [research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php](http://research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php)

In addition, any restarting of in-person research activities must comply with the policies and guiding principles provided at [research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php](http://research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php), including appropriate approvals for return to work authorization for individuals as well as human subject research projects.

2. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

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If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: [http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2\\_250.html](http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to [muresearchirb@missouri.edu](mailto:muresearchirb@missouri.edu).

Thank you,  
MU Institutional Review Board

## Appendix C

### Gatekeeper Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation

I, \_\_\_\_\_, grant permission for administrators and educators within the Noble Network at Anywhere High School to be contacted to participate in the study “Examining Equity and Opportunity within Advanced Placement Programs Using the Lens of Social Justice” conducted by Crystal Ward, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect faculty choosing to participate:

- All participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
- All identities will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur with each administrator either in-person or via videoconference, lasting approximately one hour in length.
- A survey to measure teacher perceptions of social justice leadership and its impact on college readiness will be sent to principals using Google Survey.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for educators in your school district to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for Program Participation Form*, please return it to Crystal Ward as soon as possible.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for administrators and educators in my program to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Institution:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Please return to: Crystal Ward, 5349 Amesbury Dr. Apt 2212 Dallas, Texas 75206  
Cell Phone: 816-548-0676 Email: crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu**

## Appendix D

### Letter of Informed Consent - Educator Participant

You are being asked to participate in a survey entitled “Examining Equity and Opportunity within Advanced Placement Programs Using the Lens of Social Justice” which is being conducted by Crystal Ward, a doctoral student with the University of Missouri. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Crystal Ward via email at [crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu](mailto:crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu) or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at [bmartin@ucm.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucm.edu) . If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (573) 882-3181.

Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent from Leader Participant

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study Examining Equity and Opportunity within Advanced Placement Programs Using the Lens of Social Justice, conducted by Crystal Ward doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- My participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- My responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
- My identity will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur either in-person or via video conference at a mutually agreed upon time, lasting approximately one hour in length.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached **signed consent form**, seal it in the enclosed envelope or send via email, to Crystal Ward as soon as possible. ***Please to be sure and include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you.***

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position:  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Contact Information:

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (circle one) WORK HOME CELL

Best time for contact: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Please return to: Crystal Ward, 5349 Amesbury Dr. Apt 2212 Dallas, Texas 75206  
Cell Phone: 816-548-0676 Email: crwn78@mail.mssouri.edu**



## Appendix F

### Teacher Participant Information

#### Teacher Survey Questions

##### **Introduction**

You are being asked to participate in a survey entitled “Examining Equity and Opportunity within Advanced Placement Programs Using the Lens of Social Justice,” which is being conducted by Crystal Ward, a doctoral student with the University of Missouri. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary; however, your input is crucial. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate.

Those that return by the deadline and want to enter to win a \$25 Amazon gift card will be asked to submit their email address. The email address will only be used to send the winning gift card.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Crystal Ward via email at [crwn78@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:crwn78@mail.missouri.edu)

If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 1-888-280-5002 ( a free call), or emailing [MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu](mailto:MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu).

Thank you,

Crystal R. Ward  
Doctoral Student  
University of Missouri – Columbia

## Appendix G

### Teacher Survey Questions

**Instruction:**

Please select the answer that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Most statements allow you the opportunity to provide further detail so that the researcher may better understand your response. This is optional, however occasionally providing details will be helping to better understand the culture of Anywhere High School.

**Teacher Questions:**

<b>Demographic Questions</b>
What is your gender? Male, Female, Other (Specify), I prefer not to say
What is your ethnicity? White, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Native American or American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, Other
How long have you worked in education? This is my first year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 15+ years
What is your highest level of education? High School Diploma, Bachelors, Masters, Post Graduate

	<b>Strongly Disagree 1</b>	<b>Disagree 2</b>	<b>Agree 3</b>	<b>Strongly Agree 4</b>
I believe I can go to school administration with open and honest feedback concerning my students and their success or challenges. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
My leader creates a space for staff, students and parents to provide diverse viewpoints. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
School administration allows time for discussions and feedback without shutting this discussion down prematurely. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
The administration encourages and participates in open and honest	1	2	3	4

discussion about issues relating to diversity and social justice. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...				
School administration is open to the possibility of having one's mind changed. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
My administration listens closely. <b>Q1</b>	1	2	3	4
School administration, interacts frequently with diverse groups. <b>Q1</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
Anywhere High School has created a culture that is nurturing and caring for our students. <b>Q1, Q2</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
All students at Anywhere High School have access to higher-level courses. <b>Q2, Q3</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
I believe all students at Anywhere High School can attend a college or university. <b>Q2</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
My colleagues believe all students at Anywhere High School can attend a college or university. <b>Q2</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
My school has promoted social justice through training teachers on topics around equity, injustice, etc. <b>Q2, Q3</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
School administration holds teachers accountable for student success. <b>Q3</b>  Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
I receive timely feedback and suggestions on how to enhance my students' learning experience. <b>Q1, Q3</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4
Our school promotes college readiness. <b>Q2, Q3</b>  Optional: Please provide examples...	1	2	3	4

Teachers push students to challenge themselves by taking rigorous courses <b>Q2</b> Optional: Please provide examples...	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Our school provides a variety of college preparatory courses for our students. <b>Q2, Q3</b> Optional: Please provide examples	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Q2</b> As an educator I am given resources that support culturally relevant topics for my scholars. Optional: Please provide examples	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Q2</b> Our school is a place where <b>all scholars</b> fit in and are welcomed? Optional: Please provide examples	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Q3</b> If a colleague is not doing what is best for scholars, admin will address the issue? Optional: Please provide examples	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Q2</b> I have been trained to provide best practices for a variety of my scholar's needs. Optional: Please provide examples	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

Would you like to provide any additional feedback? Please write in the space provided below.

Thank you for your participation. If you would like to be entered in for a chance to win a \$25 Amazon gift card please enter your email below.

## Appendix H

### Administration and Department Lead Interview Questions

#### Admin Interview Questions

##### Introduction

Hello, my name is Crystal Ward and I first want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me and answer questions for my research study. I am the doctoral student with the University of Missouri who will be conducting the interview. My questions will focus on school leadership and its impact on college readiness.

Do you mind if I record this session ensure my own accuracy while interviewing?

The interview will take less than an hour to complete. Please answer the questions as you see fit and keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers and that participation is voluntary. If any of my questions are unclear please feel free to ask for clarification. If there is anything you would like to elaborate or follow up on, please do so as well.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Crystal Ward via email at [crwn78@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:crwn78@mail.missouri.edu)

If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 1-888-280-5002 ( a free call), or emailing [MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu](mailto:MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu).

##### **Admin Questions:**

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name, longevity in the profession, time spent in current role?	Learn about participants
2. What made you want to get into school administration?	
3. Why did you choose to work within the Noble Network or more specifically Anywhere High School, in the inner city serving a predominately minority student body that has a low-income rate of 89%?	Q1
4. What is your definition of social justice and what place does it have in education?	
5. What are the values that inform your leadership?	

6. Please tell me of an example when you were able to make social justice connections in your administrative practice.  Probe: What social justice decisions did you make? Principal only...What areas of progress were you able to make in moving your school in an equitable position?	
7. What actions or policies at your school would you describes as promoting social justice, as you have defined it?	Q1, Q2, Q3
8. What are your expectations in regard for teachers concerning preparing students for college readiness?	Q2
9. What do you think is wrong with a traditional educational system and how can it be corrected?	Q1, Q2
10. What is the first thing that comes to mind when I say "College Readiness"	Q3
11. How do you expect teachers to utilize information that you share with them?	Q3, Q2
12. What do you believe your teachers are doing that contribute to your students being college ready?  Probe: Provide examples	Q2
13. When is it necessary to question the status quo? Who decides?	Q1, Q3
14. How often do you meet with teachers to discuss their progress, lessons, and/or provide feedback?	Q3
15. How often do you ask your direct reports for feedback on how to improve the school?	Q3
16. Do you believe that it is your responsibility to be a social justice leader?	Q1
17. Do you have anything else that you would like for me to know?	

# Appendix I

## Document Analysis

### Document Analysis Protocol

Name of Document:

Audience of Document:

Purpose of the Document:

Words and phrases within the document, which are similar to Social Justice Leadership Behaviors, equitable behaviors, AP strategies,

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## Appendix J

### Observation Analysis

Interviewee/ Observations	Key Word(s)	Setting Descriptio n	Q1:	Q2:	Q3:	Date Analyzed



## VITA

Crystal Ranee Ward was born on August 12, 1983 in Kansas City, Missouri. Ms. Ward grew up in a single parent home where her mother always expressed the importance of getting a college education. As a first-generation college student, Ms. Ward is the first in her family to complete her Doctorate degree. Ms. Ward started her collegiate journey in the fall of 2001 at the University of Central Missouri. She graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Vocational Family and Consumer Science Education in December of 2004. Ms. Ward later returned to the University of Central Missouri where she graduated with her Master's in Secondary Educational Leadership in December of 2010. In December 2020 she completed her Doctorate of Education and Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia. At the university, Ms. Ward examined equity and opportunity within advanced placement programs using the lens of social justice.

Ms. Ward is a passionate school administrator that has focused her career in the urban core serving the youth that she believes needs the support. Ms. Ward has over 15 years of professional experience working with at-risk youth in various ways. She has served in various positions including teacher, life coach, assistant principal, and head principal. While working on her Doctorate, Ms. Ward accepted a position with one of the largest charter school networks in North Texas, Uplift Education. There she served as an Academic Dean and was promoted to the Director of Scholar Recruitment in 2020.

Ms. Ward became interested in studying equity and opportunity within various programs when she served as a Program Manager for a STEM focused nonprofit. There she was introduced to the Advanced Placement program and the need for more minority

scholars to have exposure to the courses. Ms. Ward would like to continue her positive impact on education in any way possible. She continues to dedicate herself to being a part of the solution that contributes to restricting the face of education.