School Leaders' Actions and Detracking for Student Achievement: A Concurrent Mixed Methods Approach

A Dissertation Presented to The Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development University of Virginia

> In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

> > by

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### ABSTRACT

Marginalized students continue to be placed in lower-level classes at disproportionate rates. Some schools have turned to detracking as a way to counter this problem. Using a concurrent mixed methods research design, this study identified several meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking. Analyses of interviews with school leaders and student outcome data suggests that providing open-access pre-IB or pre-AP courses can help increase student participation in advanced course. Leaders supported teachers in differentiating and changing their mindsets about whom constitutes an honors student. Leaders also sought to help the surrounding community articulate and support values for detracking. In terms of student relationships, leaders also communicated high expectations for students. School leaders also demonstrated a commitment to the promises of equity and heterogeneity. Leaders created and sustained a culture of honors work. Focusing on student support paid dividends for students, as did leveraging community resources. Finally, supporting teachers in navigating detracking work also supported successful student outcomes in these detracking programs. These findings suggest important implications for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers interested in expanding access to higher-level courses for marginalized students and making sure they are successful in those courses.

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# APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, School Leaders' Actions and Detracking for Student Achievement: A Concurrent Mixed Methods Approach, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, both the first in their families to graduate college, who taught me the importance of both education and justice. This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, Nathan Reeder, who assured me time and again that I would finish. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all children who live with the reality of unequal access to an enriching education.

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### **Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION**

Understanding student sorting systems and how they relate to marginalized students' outcomes will only become more important for schools in the future. Due to changing demographic patterns and an increase in wealthy, white students attending private schools (Strauss, 2014), the proportion of marginalized students in public schools in the United States continues to increase. During the 2014-15 school year, marginalized students made up a majority of public school students for the first time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These students also tend to enjoy less access to advanced courses than their white and/or wealthy peers (Chambers, 2009). Given these increasing numbers coupled with these gaps in opportunity for advanced learning, school leaders have an imperative to serve and support marginalized students. One such policy affecting marginalized students is student sorting, also known as tracking. Detracking seeks to undermine the oppressive nature of tracking by allowing as many students as possible to access higher-level courses (Oakes, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking. I used a mixed methods case study design in which I gathered and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data concurrently to generate cases. This initial data analysis allowed for the bounding of the cases based on student diversity and degree of detracking. I gathered qualitative data from teacher and building leaders in order to examine how school leaders are fostering detracking. I gathered quantitative data at each case site in order to better understand student outcomes. Both forms of data collection helped not only in site selection but also in developing an in-depth understanding of the cases and to draw meaningful implications for detracking practice. This in-depth exploration will also eventually result in the development of a conceptual model for detracking. Moreover, it will serve as the

basis for future research and development work, including the development of a de-tracking selfevaluation tool for school leaders and the validation of a survey instrument designed to help school leaders implement research-based detracking practices in their schools.

In order to understand these terms and the research questions central to the work, this introductory chapter offers a brief history of student sorting practices and how they intersect with school leadership, a clear statement of purpose and research questions, a definition of key terms, an exploration of how this work is significant to the field of school leadership, an introduction to the theoretical framework that will ground the study, an overview of the methods I will use to answer the proposed research questions along with the delimitations and limitations of the study, and an outline of the remainder of the proposal.

### **History of Tracking**

Tracking is the policy of sorting students by academic ability. Exactly who does the sorting and defining of ability varies from school to school, but this process often breaks down along lines of race and socioeconomic background (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005). The practice of tracking first became popular with the advent of the modern high school in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tyack, 1974). These tracks rigidly divided students into two groups: those with college aspirations and those who would go on to learn a trade. Following the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board*, many school divisions turned to tracking as a way to separate students of color from white students (Oakes, 2005). Beginning in the 1980s, advocates began calling for tracking reforms–including dismantling the system altogether through detracking (Oakes, 2005).

#### **History of Detracking**

Detracking is a sorting system that includes students from all backgrounds in the same classroom regardless of perceived academic ability (R. Cooper, 1996). Detracking aims to counter the ill effects of tracking in academically heterogeneous classrooms with high expectations and strong supports for all students (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005). These detracking reforms have been implemented unevenly (Loveless, 1999) and with mixed outcomes for students (Domina, McEachin, Penner, & Penner, 2015;Harris, 2012). In addition to these mixed results, few studies have examined what conditions lead to positive outcomes in detracking programs. Furthermore, despite researchers finding that principals are the second most important in-school factor in student learning in school leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), researchers have neglected trying to explore meaningful school leaders actions in terms of tracking and detracking.

# **Current Landscape of Student Sorting**

Because of the de-centralized nature of school divisions in the United States, understanding student sorting on a large scale is difficult. In elementary schools, educators tend to use ability grouping within the classroom to separate students into particular groups for instruction or practice (Takako Nomi, 2010). In secondary schools, students and parents may be able to exercise some choice over course enrollment (Billingham & Hunt, 2016). However, master schedule organization (Kelly & Price, 2011), required courses (Kelly, 2007), biased teacher (Hughes, 2020) and counselor recommendations (Bernhardt, 2014; Francis et al., 2019), and other external factors may inhibit students' choices. Several gaps in understanding student sorting begin to emerge. We are unsure of how many schools use tracking and how each student

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sorting system functions. There is also a lack of data concerning detracking and student outcomes.

### **School Leadership and Student Sorting**

Although districts may make policies regarding student sorting (Kelly, 2007), the implementation of such systems is generally under the purview of the school principal (Turner & Spain, 2016). Researchers, however, lack a clear understanding of how school leaders might influence the implementation of different programs in terms of student outcomes. The association between principals' actions and student achievement seems intuitive, but meta-analyses suggest difficulty in directly attributing student outcomes to principals (J. A. Grissom et al., 2015; Witziers et al., 2003). What seems more likely is that some principal behaviors may have an impact on the factors that lead to student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015; Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee, 2016; Youngs & King, 2002). Exactly how these behaviors have an effect on student outcomes remains an area of active discussion and disagreement among educational researchers. With this study, I am to add to researchers' understanding about principals' potential impacts on student outcomes through detracking.

### **Study Purpose and Research Questions**

Given the history and gaps outlined above, the purpose of this study was to identify and understand the meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking using student outcome data coupled with teacher and building leader interviews. I used a mixed methods case study design in which I gathered and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data concurrently to generate cases. This initial data analysis allowed for the bounding of the cases based on student diversity and degree of detracking. I gathered qualitative data from teacher and building leaders in order to examine how school leaders are fostering detracking. I gathered quantitative data at each case site in order to better understand student options and outcomes. Both forms of data collection helped not only in site selection but also in developing an in-depth understanding of the cases and to draw meaningful implications for detracking practice. This indepth exploration will also eventually result in the development of a conceptual model for detracking. Moreover, it will serve as the basis for future research and development work, including the development of a de-tracking self-evaluation tool for school leaders and the validation of a survey instrument designed to help school leaders implement research-based detracking practices in their schools. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do school leaders foster detracking in their schools?Research Question 2a: What student outcomes exist in detracking programs?Research Question 2b: How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracking programs?

# **Definition of Terms**

The term "*detracking*" is defined as the breaking down of student sorting systems into more inclusive instructional programs (Burris & Murphy, 2014). Detracking programs may include the complete dismantling of student sorting by perceived academic ability (Watanabe et al., 2007) or the introduction of other types of programs meant to expand access to a rigorous curriculum (Domina, Hanselman, Hwang, & McEachin, 2016). This study makes the type of program clear at each site.

The term "*marginalized student*" represents students who are part of a non-dominant group in terms of decision-making at the school policy level (Cummins, 2017). Students may experience minoritization based on gender expression, home language, race, religion, sexual

orientation, socioeconomic status, or a host of other factors (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). The marginalizing factors at work in a particular site will be made clear during the study.

The term "*school leader*" is defined as those with decision-making power in terms of policy at the school level (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Additional terms might include principal, assistant principal, or administrator (Bastian & Henry, 2015).

The term "*student outcome*" is a nebulous one. This study sought to understand student outcomes in three different areas: achievement test data, graduation rates, and student representation in higher level courses. Although they often overlap, these outcomes occur both at a school and a student level.

### Achievement

At the student level, achievement will refer to individual test scores and also a sense of achievement as communicated by teachers and administrators. At the school level, achievement in this study will be defined by achievement test data. This test data included information from state report cards and the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights reporting.

### **Graduation Rates**

At both the school and student level, graduation rates will reflect the percentage of students who graduate on time. An on-time graduation rate in most states is defined through the expectation that most students will graduate high school within four years (VDOE, 2008).

### **Student Representation in Higher-Level Courses**

The Office of Civil Rights tracks student enrollment in advanced courses such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. This study examined the demographics of these courses alongside the demographics of the school to see how schools fared in enrolling more underrepresented students in these classes. The term "*tracking*" is defined as student sorting by perceived academic ability (Oakes, 2005). Some sorting programs separate students on a class-by-class basis (Mayer, 2008) while others separate students into a track that defines a student's entire day (Chmielewski et al., 2013). Ability grouping also often falls under this term. Because such grouping is generally used in elementary settings and this study focuses on secondary schools, tracking will be the dominant term.

# Significance and Contributions to the Field

As outlined above, missing from the current body of research is a robust discussion of how school leaders might create the necessary and sufficient conditions for students to succeed in classrooms without resorting to tracking systems that separate students based on race and class. The association between principals' actions and student outcomes seems intuitive, but meta-analyses suggest difficulty in directly attributing student outcomes to principals (J. A. Grissom et al., 2015; Witziers et al., 2003). For example, researchers in Canada found that principals had an effect on student graduation rates and English test scores when accounting for how long a principal had been at the school (Coelli & Green, 2012). A team in North Carolina found principals add some value to test scores in primary grades, between 0.12–0.17 standard deviations (Dhuey & Smith, 2018). Despite these findings, however, there is little agreement on the why or how of school leaders' impacts (Corcoran, 2017; Supovitz et al., 2010).

What seems more likely than a direct effect is that some decisions principals make have an impact on the factors that lead to student achievement such as enacting instructional leadership (R. Goddard et al., 2015), building trust with teachers (Youngs & King, 2002), and cultivating a positive school climate that mitigates teacher turnover (M. A. Kraft et al., 2016). Researchers have also found that principals' expectations of students (Lewis & Cheng, 2006) and personal experiences with tracking (Biafora & Ansalone, 2008) both have a relationship with how schools sort students but no work has been done on how school leaders might behave in a detracked school. This research furthers our understanding of the links between principal actions and student outcomes. Because this dissertation focuses on principal actions in equitable student sorting programs, this research will also advance the ability of principal preparation and development programs to help school leaders better serve marginalized students.

# **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptualizing the complicated relationships among school leaders, detracking, student learning, and equitable outcomes requires a large theoretical toolbox. Many social and cultural factors affect each of these variables in ways leaders must address to ensure equitable student outcomes–particularly when considering marginalized student populations. In this study, Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) work together to provide an integrated framework that can guide school leaders and those researching those leaders' work.

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory posits that schools often replicate students' existing socioeconomic status through various systems. Critical Race Theory expands on Bourdieu and suggests that race plays a dominant role in how schools treat students. Culturally responsive school leadership then provides a theory of action for school leaders looking to overcome the oppressive policies and practices that may be at work in their school.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership worked as the central theoretical framework of this study. Cultural reproduction theory and Critical Race Theory support that central framework with a theoretical understanding of how CRSL functions in dialogue with historical student sorting practices. CRSL informed data collection and analysis by providing theoretical patterns to consider during data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; see Appendix A). The tenants of CRSL also provided a basis for analytic generalization (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Because CRSL often suggests including historically marginalized families in school decision-making, it also provided an interesting framework through which to explore how school leaders manage political pushback from privileged families (Diamond & Lewis, 2015; Roda & Wells, 2013; Yonezawa et al., 2002).

Combining Bourdieu, CRT, and CRSL theories provides for a way to both describe and critique leadership within tracking or detracking systems-particularly how those systems meet the needs of marginalized students. This study also backgrounds two theories of student sorting in order to better understand the structures of student curricular organization: Sorensen's theory of the organizational dimensions of tracking and opportunity to learn. Sorensen names four dimensions of student sorting: electivity, inclusivity, selectivity, and scope while opportunity to learn theory provides a lens through which researchers can understand impacts of sorting systems on student learning. With this information, leaders can also design and implement sorting systems that better serve all students. This conceptual framework has implications for those studying school leaders who maintain at least some control over both instructional organization (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000) and instructional leadership (Cosner et al., 2012; Supovitz et al., 2010). Leaders and researchers need first to understand the mechanisms by which tracking reproduces existing class and racial structures before they can attempt to undermine inequality with access to integrated classrooms where every student can thrive.

Myriad social and cultural factors affect the ways in which leaders can ensure equitable student outcomes–particularly when considering marginalized student populations. Multiple

conceptual frameworks can help to illuminate these factors and provide an understanding of how those factors intersect. Using social reproduction theory, CRT, and CRSL in concert with Sorensen's student sorting organizational theory and opportunity to learn to research leaders attempting detracking as a culturally responsive instructional leadership practice provides a strong conceptual framework for understanding and evaluating leaders' actions.

### Methodology

# Using Quantitative Data to Understand the Problem of Practice

Before embarking upon site selection, I used existing datasets to examine current student sorting practices. The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) provided information about honors courses offered along with school demographic information that is often related to tracking–race (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016a), socioeconomic status (Oakes, 2005), and the racial diversity of each school (Sebastian, Thornton, and McCarthy, under review). I used this data to further understand the demographic makeup of schools operating without explicit honors courses. Examination of this SASS data also provided an overview of student sorting practices and further informed my inclusion criteria and site selection process.

### **Site Selection and Inclusion Criteria**

A preliminary review of programs of study in Virginia suggested that racial diversity was a significant predictor of the number of levels of courses offered (Sebastian, et al., under review). After calculating a diversity index (or d-index) similar to Kelly and Price (2011), my colleagues and I found that the difference between a d-index of 0.00 and a d-index of 1.00 is 0.71 levels per course when controlling for poverty and district size. This finding suggests that in schools with a mix of white students and students of color, tracking becomes more prevalent. This finding thus also suggests some initial inclusion criteria for creating comparative case studies among schools functioning at different levels of detracking with different diversity measures.

In this study, each school functioned as an exploratory case (Yin, 2018) within each of the identified quadrants (see Figure 1.1). These quadrants are designed to introduce variations that enable helpful comparability.



Figure 1-1: Preliminary quadrants of detracking and racial diversity

# **Project Phases**

Again, the purpose of this study was to identify and develop a rich understanding of the meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking. I accomplished this by conducting teacher and school leader interviews with staff from four schools, analyzing programs of study, and by reviewing student outcome data. I used a convergent mixed methods design (see Figure 1.2) to first explore these actions qualitatively at each of the case study sites and then to quantitively explore potential associations between school leaders' actions within the detracking program and student outcomes (QUAL+quan).



Figure 1-2: Convergent mixed methods study design.

The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of school leaders' actions in which teacher and leader interviews were collected at the four sites meeting the inclusion criteria discussed above. The quantitative findings were then used to further understand student outcomes at those sites. In the final phase, I mixed the qualitative and quantitative findings in order to present a case-oriented analysis (see Table 1.1).

<b>Research Question</b>	Focus	Data Collection Overview	Data Analysis Overview
1. How do school leaders foster	This question seeks to understand what	Interviews at Site B & D: • 4 department chairs	Interviews: In vivo coding (Creswell, 2014)
detracking in their schools?	administrators who are leading detracking in their schools do, including their actions, the systems they put in place, their instructional leadership among faculty, etc. using school-level observations, interviews, and focus groups	("core" subjects) • 1 principal • 2-4 assistant principals <u>Interviews at Site A &amp; C:</u> • 1 principal <u>Programs of Study:</u> • English • Math • Science • Social Studies	Programs of Study: Quantitative analysis of levels offered and prerequisites

2a. What student outcomes exist in detracking programs?	This question seeks to understand the student outcomes	Quantitative data from each site: • Graduation rates	Quantitative Data: Descriptive statistics student outcomes by
	present at the focal schools in terms of graduation, school climate, and student achievement data.	<ul><li>Student achievement tests</li><li>Advanced course enrollment</li></ul>	ESSA subgroups
2b. How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracking programs?	This question will merge the qualitative and quantitative data within each case in order to better understand how school leaders may be influencing student outcomes. The answers to this question will also involve comparing the cases in order to make claims about school leaders, detracking programs, and student outcomes.	Interviews at Site B & D: • 4 department chairs ("core" subjects) • 1 principal • 2-4 assistant principals Interviews at Site A & C: • 1 principal Quantitative data from each site: • Graduation rates • Student achievement tests • Advanced course enrollment • Programs of Study	Observations, Interviews and Focus Groups: Analytical generalization (Onwuegbuzie, 2009) Quantitative data: Internal statistical generalization (Onwuegbuzie, 2009) <u>Mixing the methods:</u> Case-oriented analysis (Onwuegbuzie, 2009) and cross-case comparisons (Yin, 2018).

Table 1-1: Data collection analysis summary

# **Delimitations and Limitations**

# Delimitations

The following delimitations apply to this study:

- Despite various tracking and detracking systems in practice globally, this study included only schools that have enacted a detracking program in the United States. This sampling decision allowed for a deeper analysis of within-group variation throughout the country rather than between-group variations concerning other countries educational programs, which would entail a deep understanding of each country's program.
- 2. This study included only schools that have been enacting a detracking program for at least three years. This sampling decision allowed for deeper analysis of the inner-workings of programs without the accompanying noise of a newly-instituted program.

3. While recognizing that school districts and state-level departments of education likely influence student sorting policies, this study included only school-level leadership actions and not district- or state-level perspectives in order to provide a deeper analysis of school leaders' actions.

# Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study:

- Questioning assumptions of neutrality is crucial to the use of CRT in educational research, and the neutrality of student achievement data must submit to such questioning. Research in the future could seek to examine additional measures of student outcomes such as graduation rates, post-secondary plans, or even student-created measures using a participatory action researcher design (Creswell, 2014).
- 2. Researchers currently lack a formal census of schools throughout the United States implementing detracking programs. This lack of knowledge about detracking schools makes it impossible to know what might be a representative sample. The present study attempts to mitigate this concern by working with a national organization made up of detracking and tracking researchers from across the United States.

### Summary

Given what we know about the discriminatory nature of tracking programs (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005) and that building-level administrators often set the tone for a school (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016), principals have the opportunity to shape a more equitable sorting policy. Understanding how some school leaders have accomplished this feat in detracked schools can help other school administrators follow a similar path.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation**

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 first examines the historical and current landscapes of student sorting and school leaders' impact on student outcomes. The chapter then discusses the proposed study's conceptual framework, which draws upon and integrates the theories of social reproduction, Critical Race Studies, and culturally relevant school leadership while backgrounding theories about opportunity to learn and student sorting. Based on this conceptual framework, the rest of the chapter examines three literatures: (a) school leaders impacts on student outcomes, (b) culturally responsive school leadership and student outcomes, and (c) the state of tracking and detracking research. Chapter 2 concludes by synthesizing these literatures and noting how few studies have examined school leaders' actions within detracking programs and how both may affect student outcomes.

Chapter 3 then describes the study's research design and methodology, including the rationale for a convergent mixed-methods study design. After describing the site selection and sampling procedures, the chapter then explains the data sources, collection, and analysis procedures for each of the phases of the study. The chapter also notes potential limitations of the study and offers potentially mitigating solutions. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of validity, trustworthiness, ethics, and a researcher positionality statement addressing these issues. Chapter 4 offers an overview of the contexts of each of the four studied schools while Chapter 5 presents the findings from each site separately and then merged together. Chapter 6 then concludes the study with a discussion of the findings and their implications for policymakers, practioners, and researchers.

### **Chapter 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section articulates this study's conceptual framework, which foregrounds Culturally Responsive School Leadership based on structural and institutional perspectives on school leadership for detracking while backgrounding concepts related to student sorting as a practice. The first section then closes with a discussion on integrating the structural and institutional perspectives before applying them to this study. The second section examines three literatures: (a) what we know about how school leaders impact student outcomes, (b) the challenges facing school leaders seeking to implement culturally relevant school leadership practices and (c) the current landscape of tracking and detracking empirical studies. The third section concludes this chapter by synthesizing the literatures and examining gaps that provide a rationale for this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptualizing the complicated relationships among school leaders, detracking, and equitable student outcomes requires a large theoretical toolbox. Many social and cultural factors affect each of these variables in ways leaders must address to ensure equitable student outcomes– particularly when considering marginalized student populations. To study such complex relationships, scholars recommend using multiple frames to better understand such phenomena (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). As a result of this recommendation, the conceptual framework for this study considers five distinct concepts regarding school leadership and student curricular organization.

Three perspectives are intentionally foregrounded: (a) Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1986) because this study's unit of analysis–a school leader implementing detracking–should inherently interrupt the cultural reproduction often at work in school settings, (b) Critical Race Theory because school leadership for detracking also engages in the inherently critical work of considering how race functions in school leaders' decision making processes and actions (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009), and (c) Culturally Responsive School Leadership because the concepts of this theory of school leadership provide a useful lens for understanding how school leaders act to support all students (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), including through successful detracking implementation (Yamauchi, 2003). Given the study's focus on school leaders, two theories concerning how students are sorted and how this affects their opportunity to learn are backgrounded in order to further enrich the examination of school leadership for detracking. The next section describes each of these five perspectives. The final section of the conceptual framework then integrates these perspectives in order to apply them to the study of school leadership for detracking.

# **Understanding Cultural Reproduction Theory from a School Leadership Perspective**

Cultural reproduction theory suggests that distinctions attributed to dominant groups function as "capital" (Bourdieu, 1987). Those holding a given distinction can then spend that capital within a particular social exchange (Bourdieu, 1987). Social exchanges take place in the context of human interactions where one person gives or receives anything of value to or from another (Bourdieu, 1987). Thus, cultural capital functions to reproduce existing class structures. Understanding how students are sorted into classes through this lens views choices about student recommendations as a social exchange, with placement in high-level courses seen as valuable. Cultural reproduction theory asks what is exchanged in order to secure this placement. Bourdieu's theory helps those seeking to lead schools equitably understand how students' cultural capital works in those exchanges. His work can also help those researching school leaders conceptualize the different exchanges of cultural capital underlying leaders' decisions. Chambers, Huggins, Locke, & Fowler (2014), for example, use Bourdieu to understand how social inequalities are often exacerbated by the tracking decisions made in schools. The authors conclude "schools are complicit in the perpetuation and maintenance of social and economic stratification" (p. 468) through tracking practices.

Bourdieu's work also provides an important critique of other frameworks that suggest schools are designed to overcome inequality. In exploring how one such frame, multiculturalism, may actually help to undermine efforts at expanding educators' understandings of what counts as cultural capital, Olneck (2000), expanding on Bourdieu, observed that formal education functions to re-create dominant structures. Olneck delineates three types of cultural capital at work in classrooms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Olneck's framework makes clear that for school leaders attempting to practice equitable leadership, understanding the mechanisms of cultural capital is key to undermining the dominance of any one culture in a school. For researchers, understanding this expansion of Bourdieu's work using these three types of cultural capital can help guide the evaluation of student sorting programs–including those that educators claim serve student interests (see Table 2.1).

Type of Cultural Capital	Definition	Example in Schools
Embodied	Manners or mannerisms,	Students able to sit quietly in
	ways of acting, ways of	class, raise their hands when
	speaking, and ways of	the teacher asks questions,
	dressing associated with a	and contributing to class
	particular class represent	without calling out.
	embodied cultural capital	
	(Olneck, 2000)	
Institutionalized	Cultural distinctions the	A student having two parents
	dominant group values	with college degrees and thus
	(Bourdieu, 1986)	teachers believing that
		student will also attend
		college.
Objectified	The objects a particular social	School bags carried by
	group associates with a	students from a particular

particular class (Bourdieu,	neighborhood where residents
1986)	tend to have a lot of money

Table 2-1: Definitions and examples of cultural capital functioning in schools.

# Embodied Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is embodied in all of the ways we can see that someone belongs to a particular social class (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, manners or mannerisms, ways of acting, ways of speaking, and ways of dressing associated with a particular class represent embodied cultural capital (Olneck, 2000). Left out of this discussion is race as an embodied form of cultural capital, and I will explain race as a necessary addition in the context of Critical Race Theory later in this chapter.

# Institutionalized Cultural Capital

Institutionalized cultural capital exists in cultural distinctions the dominant group values (Bourdieu, 1986). Academic credentials are often seen as one such distinction. For example, a bachelor's degree distinguishes one from those without such a degree and is often seen as a passport into the middle class (Reeves, 2017). The institutionalized cultural capital of parents having college degrees can then increase the likelihood that students will be placed in higher-level tracks regardless of actual skill level (Brunello & Checchi, 2007).

### **Objectified Cultural Capital**

Objectified cultural capital exists in the objects a particular social group associates with a particular class (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, students with high levels of cultural capital may wear certain items of clothing or shoes that subconsciously transmit to which track they belong. Objectified cultural capital can also appear in "valued literature (as 'canon'), stories, music, dance forms, and art" (Olneck, 2000, p. 320). These objects are considered valuable in social exchanges when they mirror objects valued by the dominant social class within that exchange.

In a school setting, this exchange may look like "canonical" texts being used in a high-track classroom versus more simplistic literature employed in a lower-track classroom (Gritter, 2018).

# Linking Cultural Reproduction Theory and School Leadership for Detracking

The use of cultural reproduction theory can ultimately serve to deconstruct leaders' instructional decisions within the realms of race, class, types of parental support, and behavior. Using this theory can also help to identify other forms of cultural capital that may be at work in a particular school. Despite the age of cultural reproduction theory, research using Bourdieu to understand various models of tracking and detracking joins a vibrant discussion in current literature. For example, researchers in Europe recently found that school tracking is significantly associated with students following their parents' educational trajectories (Collischon & Eberl, 2019). In the United States, Donaldson, LeChasseur, & Mayer (2017) used Bourdieu's framework to conceptualize regression models that demonstrated teachers in lower-track classes provided "significantly less emotional support, organizational support, and instructional support to students in their classes than did teachers of high track classrooms" (p. 183). In both of these studies, students who enter school with the least amount of cultural capital also leave with the least amount. As Bourdieu describes, the social class of students is then reproduced by schools and their leaders.

# "The Wages of Whiteness" and Other Sources of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu does not discuss race in his theory development, so researchers who study racial disparities have drawn on other sociological theories that expand the definition of cultural capital to include race. Long before Bourdieu, W.E.B. DuBois spoke of whiteness itself as "psychological wage" (DuBois, 1935). According to DuBois, this wage of whiteness originally served to reward whiteness at the expense of newly-freed slaves, thus creating a different type of cultural capital at work in the United States that continues today (Harris, 1993;Howe, 2014). In examining the lives of middle-class Black students in London, Wallace (2017) combines race into cultural reproduction theory in order to argue that habitus of race, not just socioeconomic class, impact the cultural capital educators perceive students to have when considering how and what to teach them. Combining these racialized understandings of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction with Critical Race Theory provides another useful lens through which to understand how school leaders might attempt to end tracking and support detracking.

# Using Critical Race Theory to Understand School Leaders' Decisions Regarding Student Sorting Systems

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines and criticizes how race and racism function in social systems (Delgado et al., 2017). Four CRT themes are particularly important to the study of school leadership for tracking and detracking and add to Bourdieu's work discussed above: 1) the permanence of racism in life in the U.S., 2) skepticism regarding assertions of neutrality, 3) the assertion that nothing changes related to race unless it also serves white interests (also known as interest convergence), and 4) the challenging of analyses of educational practices that do not take race into account (Ladson-Billings, 1998). T

These themes provide an additional theoretical rationale for the study of leadership in regards to tracking and detracking. These themes also provide source material for the coding of qualitative data and an additional set of assumptions to consider and test in developing quantitative studies that might study how school leaders devise student sorting programs.

### The Permanence of Racism

CRT helps to explain tracking as it recognizes the permanence and prevalence of racism in every aspect of American life, including schools (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016). School leaders supporting tracking programs often claim they are neutral or that students get to choose their courses. CRT provides a framework for seeing racism at work even when school leaders themselves may not hold prejudices. Examining leadership for detracking provides a challenge to the existing tracking framework that does not consider how minoritization accounts for class or level assignment.

### Skepticism of Neutrality

In addition to providing a framework for challenging assertions of neutrality in tracking systems, CRT also provides a way to understand situations in which detracking does not lead to large gains in student achievement for students of color. Classroom-level desegregation is no more a panacea than desegregation was in the mid-twentieth century (Walker, 1996). Racism still exists at the school and classroom level, as many of the authors examining tracking and detracking with a qualitative lens have found. For example, Venzant Chambers (2009) used qualitative case study methods to explain how early tracking normalizes the process of student sorting throughout schooling and the compounding effects of tracking influence students' later placements, particularly when it comes to Black students and other students of color. School leaders looking to create heterogeneous classrooms must consider the central tenants of CRT and how they will address them, including the need for white administrators to consider their own potential contributions to racism. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) drew on these principles in their comparative case studies that found white principals must engage in their own emotional and intellectual work concerning race before moving forward successfully with anti-racist leadership. Interest Convergence

According to the principles of CRT, nothing changes related to race unless that change also serves the interests of white people (Harris, 1993). In studying tracking, detracking, and school leadership, understanding this interest convergence helps researchers notice who student sorting programs actually benefit-even when their stated aim is equity. In one ethnography, for example, researchers found that teachers simply continued to provide support to already advantaged white students even within a nominally detracked classroom (Bair & Bair, 2011)

# Erasing Race

Because race is such a pervasive element of American society, CRT encourages all analyses of educational practices to take race into account rather than erase its importance (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In understanding tracking and detracking, researchers must take into the account how race informs and shapes student sorting policies. In understanding school leaders' actions, researchers must also consider how administrators', parents', students', and teachers' racial identities intersect to inform school policies, in particular one so consequential and so often racialized as tracking.

### **CRT** at Work

Both qualitative and quantitative work can benefit from using CRT as a conceptual framework. Brooks et al. (2013) use CRT to frame their narrative writing choice as a counterstory as they explore the excuses administrators and teachers used for a lack of students of color in advanced courses at a racially heterogeneous high school. This model can provide a guide for others seeking to qualitatively understand the barriers that exist when students of color seek membership in advanced tracks. For Faulkner, et al., (2014), CRT provides a way to frame regression results that demonstrate strong correlations between student race and mathematics class placement, even after controlling for other factors educators might point to in order to explain such a discrepancy such as SES or prior achievement. Using a CRT framework, the authors understand that the "enhanced property value of whiteness (and conversely the devaluation of Blackness) is in operation as early as elementary school." (p. 307). These findings

have strong implications for school leaders seeking to support marginalized students because CRT provides a framework to seek out and challenge barriers thrown up against those students. Thus, combining CRT with Bourdieu's theory expands researchers' understandings of cultural capital to include race as a form of embodied cultural capital while students' home cultures, seeped in race in the United States, also provide forms of institutionalized and objectified cultural capital (see Table 2.2).

Type of Cultural Capital	Definition	Example in Schools Using a CRT Lens
Embodied	Manners or mannerisms, ways of acting, ways of speaking, and ways of dressing associated with a particular class represent embodied cultural capital (Olneck, 2000)	Students sharing mannerisms often associated with the race of the teacher.
Institutionalized	Cultural distinctions the dominant group values (Bourdieu, 1986)	A student having two parents with college degrees and thus teachers believing that student will also attend college.
Objectified	The objects a particular social group associates with a particular class (Bourdieu, 1986)	School bags carried by students from a particular neighborhood where are likely white and college- educated.

*Table 2-2: Definitions and examples of cultural capital functioning in schools seen through a CRT lens.* 

# **Foregrounding Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

With the structural and institution bases of cultural reproduction theory and critical race theory, culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) combines many conceptual understandings of serving students who are marginalized due to their lack of cultural capital (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016) along with enhancing specific practices leaders can take to improve student learning (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). CRSL provides a way to discuss these practices in a larger framework that values marginalized students while considering the institutional barriers that can harm marginalized students. Principals practicing CRSL work on overcoming their own biases while assisting their teachers in doing so as well, identifying and dismantling barriers to student success, and enacting culturally responsive instructional leadership. Understanding CRSL as a lens for research provided important framing for coding interviews with school leaders attempting detracking.

### **Educators Overcoming Biases**

CRSL can be difficult to accomplish in many public school contexts. Some principals often have their own biases against marginalized students (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) while they must also help other educators in their buildings overcome their biases (Jones & Ringler, 2017). Culturally responsive school leaders also work with students' caregivers and students themselves to create more inclusive classrooms by increasing volunteering, addressing deficit perspectives, and improving support structures (DeMatthews, 2015). Identifying and Dismantling Barriers to Marginalized Students' Success

A CRSL practice also helps leaders address the issues of cultural reproduction theory outlined above. Khalifa (2010), for example, found leaders in one district "could not recognize (and thus could not validate) any types of capital aside from that associated with traditional students in the dominant culture" (p.631) until leaders could enact CRSL. A CRSL practice would embrace detracking and provide a desegregated and enriching classroom for every student. Focusing on this rigorous and relevant instruction, is a hallmark of a successful detracking program (Burris & Murphy, 2014). This CRSL-informed rigor is borne out by Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008), who found the schools with improved student outcomes had themselves focused on rigorous and relevant instruction. Combining these findings suggest that school leaders' policies focused on building teachers' capacity to institute this type of instruction can help create more schools with excellent outcomes for marginalized students.

### Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership

Another key CRSL practice is culturally responsive instructional leadership, which encourages teachers to work against their own biases and societal barriers to student learning (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). A large study of an entire school district found culturally responsive instructional leaders can have significant impact in promoting culturally relevant pedagogy (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018), which can in turn positively impact student achievement (Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

# CRSL, CRT, and Bourdieu

Culturally responsive school leadership works in conversation with Bourdieu and CRT by challenging notions of the dominant culture as the solely "successful" one and provides ways for students to see their culture as valuable (Fraise & Brooks, 2015) while also demanding high expectations for every student (Sharif Matthews & López, 2019). CRSL also aids educators in putting to work the lessons of Bourdieu and CRT when it comes to student sorting. To better understand school leaders' decisions in regards to student sorting, however, researchers require a strong conceptual understanding of the processes of that sorting before beginning deep study of these phenomena.

### **Backgrounding the Structures of Student Sorting**

Student sorting is a complex endeavor that touches many areas of a school leaders' responsibilities. These areas include teacher hiring and class assignment (Demetra Kalogrides et al., 2013), master scheduling (Mayer, 2008), and instructional leadership (Mayer et al., 2018), among others. Understanding the mechanisms through which students are sorted and how this
sorting affects their opportunity to learn can further enrich the examination of school leadership for detracking.

### Sorenson's Framework for Organizational Differentiation

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation (1970) names four dimensions for evaluating how students are organized into tracked classes: scope, electivity, selectivity, and inclusivity. By using these dimensions to understand how school leaders are acting related to detracking, this framework can inform both qualitative data collection and the development of a quantitative instrument. Despite the age of this framework, several recent studies have continued to demonstrate Sorensen's contemporary currency. For example, Kelly & Price (2011) used the framework to explain tracking at work throughout the state of North Carolina.

**Scope.** Determining the scope of student sorting asks if students are permitted to take courses at different levels in different subjects or if formal and informal barriers may stop them. For example, Lucas and Berends (2002) found that even when accounting for student achievement, leveling in one subject can drive student placement in other subjects. Studies examining Sorensen's definition of scope allow researchers and practitioners to understand the impact of even one curricular decision on a students' larger schedule.

**Electivity.** Considering electivity examines to what extent students are able to choose their courses. Gamoran (1992) suggests that even when tracks are considered open to student choices, gatekeepers such as teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors can impact these choices. More recently, Venzant Chambers & Spikes (2016) found that Black students were more likely to receive tracking dicta than white students in the same school. This portion of Sorensen's framework provides an entry to examining what school leaders might mean when they assert that students get to choose their tracks or courses (Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

**Selectivity.** Selectivity concerns the number of levels of courses offered in each department. Sorensen measures selectivity as an effort to have the "proper" type of student in each course. This dimension analyzes sorting as a means to create levels to match perceived student ability. Understanding selectivity can be helpful in understanding educators' resistance to (LeBlanc, 2014) or embrace of (Godley, et al., 2015) detracking.

**Inclusivity.** An organizational differentiation framework asks two important questions about the inclusivity of a tracking program (Sorensen, 1970): 1) What are the demographics of the highest levels of courses (Kelly, 2007), and 2) what future options do students have for coursework once in a particular track (Gamoran, 1992)? Understanding how students are tracked from the early grades can help researchers examine the ways in which student outcomes may be affected by this sorting. Heck et al. (2004) found that students tended to remain in particular tracks throughout high school. Tracking, however, can affect students' options past high school graduation. Giersch (2018), for example, found that students from upper tracks did better in college even after controlling for previous achievement. An inclusivity lens helps leaders examine how tracking systems include or exclude certain students from particular outcomes, particularly from opportunities to learn.

#### Understanding Opportunity to Learn

Carroll (1989) first introduced the concept of OTL as a relationship between the time needed to learn content and the time students spend learning that content. Schmidt, Cogan, Houang, and McKnight (2011) advanced a definition of OTL focused on content because "the profession of content is the fundamental rationale of schooling and the education system," and "this is an aspect of schooling that both reflects education policy and is amenable to education police reform" (p. 400).

**OTL and Student Organization.** Differences in OTL among tracked groups of students may account for some of the differences in outcomes for these students. Barnard-Brak and colleagues (2018) found that even students who had similar test scores yet had lower OTL were less likely to answer mathematics questions correctly than students with higher OTL. According to Arnold-Berkovits and colleagues (2019), time spent on instruction correlated with higher test scores.

**OTL and Marginalized Students.** OTL differences can be particularly acute in terms of outcomes for students who lack access to cultural capital. Schmidt et al. (2015) found not only is there a positive relationship between student socioeconomic status and OTL but nearly one-third of the SES relationship to reading achievement is due to the association between SES and OTL. Drawing on the foregrounded perspectives and Sorensen's organizational theory, OTL adds an important dimension to researching how school leaders can best act in terms of detracking.

# Integrating and Applying Five Perspectives on Student Sorting to Study School Leadership for Detracking

This section follows Ravitch and Riggans's suggestion to integrate multiple theoretical frameworks in order to shape a rigorous research process (2012). To shape this study, concepts from each of the five perspectives were integrated and then applied to school leaders attempting detracking in high schools. Figure 2.1 offers a visual representation of this integration and application, which the following section details.

First, understanding cultural capital in terms of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction creates tools for researchers to understand student sorting decisions in terms of exchanges of cultural capital (Rex, 2002). This theory also challenges the idea of school as a meritocracy while asking questions that consider what exchanges of cultural capital happen not just in the process of sorting students but after students are sorted as well. Both the decisions

school leaders make and their consequences are steeped in exchanges of cultural capital (Khalifa, 2010).

Second, expanding the definition of cultural capital to include race provides researchers with a more nuanced understanding of the student sorting decisions school leaders make along with the impact of those decisions. Considering the key tenants of Critical Race Theory (CRT) grounds this research project in an understanding that no structure like student sorting can be race neutral (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016a). Over 400 years' worth of history in the United States influences decisions that school leaders make today. The subtlety of these influences are made apparent by incorporating CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Third, examining school leaders' decisions and impact through the lens of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) provides behaviors to look for in understanding school leaders' decisions regarding student sorting. CRSL offers researchers concrete considerations to undertake when in the school environment. These considerations, enumerated above, are grounded in the need to consider racial and socioeconomic factors in schooling highlighted by Critical Race Theory and Cultural Reproduction Theory respectively.

Fourth, researchers require a firm understanding of the innerworkings of student sorting systems. By considering the different levels for which Sorensen offers explanations, I am able to better understand the detracking systems under study. Considering students' opportunity to learn also provides a way to understand what happens to students after they are sorted in the system leaders have designed and/or implemented.

Thus, foregrounding Bourdieu, CRT, and CRSL in a conceptual framework provides for a way to both describe and critique leadership with tracking or detracking systems–particularly how those systems meet the needs of students lacking in cultural capital with theories of student organization and opportunity to learn in the background to better understand these systems. Used in combination, each of these frameworks allows me to describe school leaders' decisions concerning student sorting system, question supposed neutrality, and diagnose leadership issues that keeping students from succeeding or that support them in their endeavors.



Figure 2-1: An integrated framework for understanding school leadership for detracking.

With the additional perspectives of how school sorting systems often function, researchers can consider whether or not leaders are designing and implementing sorting systems that better serve all students. This work has implications for the school leaders who maintain at least some control over both instructional organization (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000) and instructional leadership (Cosner et al., 2012; Supovitz et al., 2010). Leaders need first to understand the mechanisms by which tracking reproduces existing class structures before they can attempt to undermine inequality with access to integrated classrooms where every student can thrive. Those studying school leaders need a similar understanding of these mechanisms.

Myriad social and cultural factors affect the ways in which leaders can ensure equitable student outcomes–particularly when considering student populations with limited cultural capital. The conceptual framework articulated above can help to illuminate these factors and provide an understanding of how those factors intersect.

# **Review of the Literature**

To provide further insight into the context in which school leaders design and implement detracking, the next section of this chapter first discusses how school leaders may impact student outcomes and then reviews the existing literature on culturally responsive school leadership practices along with tracking and detracking. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the identified gaps I seek to address within the study.

#### **School Leaders' Impact on Student Outcomes**

Despite researchers finding that principals are the second most important in-school factor in student learning in school leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), finding clear associations between school leaders' actions and student outcomes has remained mixed. This association between principals' actions and student achievement seems intuitive, but meta-analyses suggest difficulty in directly attributing student outcomes to principals (J. A. Grissom et al., 2015; Witziers et al., 2003). What seems more likely, however, is that some principal behaviors may have an impact on the factors that lead to student achievement (Goddard, et al., 2015; Kraft, et. al, 2016; Youngs & King, 2002).

Researchers in Canada found that principals had an effect on student graduation rates and English test scores when accounting for how long a principal had been at the school (Coelli &

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Green, 2012). A research team in North Carolina studying principals' effects on student outcomes saw effect sizes range between .18 and .30 (Supovitz, et al., 2010). Despite these findings, there is little agreement on the why or how of school leaders' impacts. What seems more likely than a direct effect is that some decisions principals make have an impact on the factors that lead to student achievement such as enacting instructional leadership (R. Goddard et al., 2015), building trust with teachers (Youngs & King, 2002), and cultivating a positive school climate that mitigates teacher turnover (Kraft et al., 2016).

Robinson (2007) conducted a meta-analysis and found six leadership theories with some positive effect size on student learning in the literature: establishing goals and setting expectations ( $\bar{d}$ =0.35, SE=.08); strategic resourcing ( $\bar{d}$ =0.34, SE=.09); planning, coordinating and evaluating instruction ( $\bar{d}$ =0.42, SE=.07), professional development for teachers ( $\bar{d}$ =0.84, SE=.14); and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment ( $\bar{d}$ =0.27, SE=.09). In examining the mediating factors, Robinson set the stage for more specific and actionable research that begins to more precisely define both how much and through what actions school leaders influence student learning.

To understand how leadership researchers continue to build upon Robinson's work, I initially used the EBSCO database to search seven education-related databases (1) ERIC, 2) Academic Search Complete, 3) Education Full Text, 4) Education Index Retrospective: 1929-1983, 5) Education Research Complete, 6) Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and 7) SPORTDiscus). The first searches used the phrases "principals", "school leaders", "student outcomes", and "administration" to find peer-reviewed scholarly articles published in the last ten years. These parameters returned a total of 2200 articles. Because educational leadership depends a great deal on contextual factors (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010), I then narrowed my study further to journal articles whose authors primarily studied education system in the United States. This narrowing returned 129 potential articles. To further narrow the possibilities that some of these articles were not addressing K-12 school leadership concerns, I added the search terms "elementary" OR "secondary". This winnowing left 88 articles to examine to further understand the current research on how principals may impact student achievement. To be sure I had not overlooked any articles, I then repeated this process with an additional database: the American Psychological Association's PsychInfo. This database yielded 13 potential articles to analyze.

Before beginning a second round of more in-depth analysis, I then built upon the work of previous scholars through the publications of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA). Researchers associated with this consortium of exemplary principal preparation program issue various reports, studies, and policy briefs considering the field of school leadership and school leader preparation. Although these documents have not been subject to a traditional peer review process, the well-known nature of the work of UCEA provides some level of certainty that the work they produce is rigorous, thoughtful, and useful. Three of the organization's "Knowledge Utilization Briefs" had topics relevant to evaluating principal effects on student outcomes, so I added them to the list. I then moved to the second round of analysis with 101 possible articles for review (see Table 2.3).

Database	Search Terms	Limits	Search Results	Possible
				Articles
EBSCO	principal* OR	2009-2019	470	129
	"school leader"	All text		
	OR	Scholarly (peer-		
	administration	reviewed)		
	AND "student			
	outcomes"			

EBSCO	principal* OR	2009-2019	124	88
	"school leader"	All text		
	OR	Scholarly (peer-		
	administration	reviewed)		
	AND "student	United States		
	outcomes" AND			
	elementary OR			
	secondary			
PsycINFO	principal* OR	2009-2019	13	10
	"school leader"	All text		
	OR	Scholarly (peer-		
	administration	reviewed)		
	AND "student	United States		
	outcomes" AND			
	elementary OR			
	secondary			
UCEA	Leadership	2002-2018	9	3
	evaluation	Research briefs		

Table 2-3: Databases, search parameters, and results concerning school leader effects

# **Research Findings and Conclusions**

The body of research concerning school leaders' effects on student learning is small but growing. Researchers concerning themselves with leadership effects are also situating their work in deep conversations with one another. Of the 24 articles reviewed, seven had citation rates at or above 40. These most highly-cited works found that rather than examining direct effects, researchers, policy makers, and principal supervisors will have a better understanding of principal effects on student learning when considering mediating and moderating variables. In an in-depth review of these articles, I found that three found a great deal of evidence for principals' influencing instruction as the mediating variable with the largest effect size. Supovitz et al. (2010) found that principals affect student learning through instructional leadership that leads to teachers changing and improving their instructional practices. These findings were particularly strong and significant for English Language Arts (ELA) scores.

Corroborating these findings, Sebastian & Allensworth (2012) found that within high schools, variation in classroom instruction is associated with principal leadership through multiple pathways, the strongest of which is the quality of professional development and coherence of programs. Between schools, differences in instruction and student achievement are associated with principal leadership only via the learning climate. These findings suggest that in high schools, establishing a safe, post-secondary-focused climate may be the most important leadership function for promoting achievement schoolwide.

Other studies found more specific facets of instructional leadership at work in more complicated relationships with other factors. Kraft et al. (2016) found that improvements in leadership of academic expectations, teacher relationships, and school safety correspond with reducing teacher turnover. This decrease in turnover is then related to higher student test scores. School safety and academic expectations also share a relationship with student test score increase. In a study of 93 elementary schools serving students (n=4,167) with 1606 teachers in a rural Midwestern state, Goddard and colleagues (2015) found there is a significant direct effect of leadership on teacher collaboration. This relationship predicted collective efficacy beliefs which in turn predicted student achievement. Therefore, the authors argue for strong instructional leadership that focuses on these domains that can improve student achievement.

Examining Leithwood et al. (2010), however, challenges this focus solely on instructional leadership. Using survey analysis and path modeling, the authors found that leaders had the largest impacts on student experiences in schools with similar contributions on what they term the Rational, Emotional, and Family Paths. The Organizational Path had no significant effects. The Family Path has the most "untapped potential for leadership impact on student achievement" (p. 695). Particularly notably, parental involvement is helpful at the secondary school level in

addition to the elementary level as they found "children from low-income and minority families have the most to gain when schools involve parents, and parents do not have to be well-educated to help" (p.695).

Grissom and Loeb (2011) used OLS regression to find principals' organization management skills consistently predict student achievement growth and other success measures. They also found that assistant principals' evaluation of principals supports this result. In a later study, Grissom and colleagues (2015) tested five different value-added models and found that none by itself can clearly be said to measure principal effects.

**Continuity and Discontinuity.** As we can see above, researchers have come to consensus that principals play a large within-school role in affecting student achievement. Educational leadership researchers cannot agree; however, exactly how principal effects can be described as having a causal impact. Nor can researchers agree about how to measure these effects.

The potential role of complex factors. Although some agreement exists when it comes to the complexity of exactly how principals impact student achievement, exactly what those complex factors may be continues to be the subject of much debate. For example, in offering a theoretical conceptual framework that allows for assessing school leadership behaviors at the intersection of "core components and key processes" Goldring, and colleagues (2009) name the core components as "what principals or leadership teams must accomplish to improve academic and social learning for all students" (p. 25) and key processes as planning, implementing, supporting, advocacy, communication, and monitoring. As one can see, these components and processes encompasses a principal's entire job. Current measurement tools, both qualitative and quantitative, make it difficult to discern which actions have the most impact, and so disagreement continues.

One source of this disagreement may simply be the sheer number of tasks a principal accomplishes during various stages of a career. May and colleagues (2012) found that principals' activities are remarkably variable over time. This study also found that some principal activities are more prevalent in some school contexts while changes in these activities over time (such as increasing the focus on instructional leadership, for example), does not predict changes in student performance in a consistent manner across schools.

Furthermore, unlike teachers who can change classroom practice from day-to-day, principals are sometimes hemmed in by bureaucratic functioning that creates difficulties in making changes that can increase student achievement. For example, Fuller, et al., (2011) demonstrated a relationship between high-quality teams of teachers and student outcomes on a statewide standardized test, but they also found that it takes new principals several years to build these teams. These contextual, school-based factors may play a particularly significant role for leaders of schools attempting to fill opportunity gaps for students through turnarounds. Duke and Landahl (2011) found that by the third year of a turnaround, previously-implemented reforms were changed to the betterment of student achievement suggesting that "institutionalization of reforms, in other words, may not be an appropriate objective" (p. 111).

**Standardizing Effects.** These barriers to "institutionalization" have not stopped some researchers from attempting to develop some measures that suggest a simplified link between principal actions and student achievement. In the state of North Carolina, for example, Dhuey and Smith (2018) attempted to calculate a value-added score for principals and estimated the standard deviation of principals' value-added effect on gains in primary test scores to be 0.12–

0.17. However, they also noted the match between principals and schools accounts for a significant amount of principals' value added and that replacing the current principal has little effect on non-test-score school inputs and outcomes regardless of the new principal's value added. The authors also note that their results do not fully disentangle what drives the contributions that high- and low-value-added principals make to their schools and students. Also in North Carolina, Bastian & Henry, (2015) found that several principal characteristics, including holding a doctorate from an in-state private or out-of-state institution (negative) and serving as an assistant principal in a high value-added school (positive), are significantly associated with student achievement gains. The authors were not able to tease out the causes of these associations.

When examining administrative data from the British Columbia Ministry of Education administrative data on all youth enrolled in grade 12 in public schools at the start of November in the period 1995–2004, researchers found principals have a strong impact on standardized test scores but less of an impact on graduation rates (Coelli & Green, 2012). Using school fixedeffects models, the authors found that principals seem to explain 11.9% of variance in graduation rates and 58.8% of the variance in ELA standardized test scores. They also found that these percentages vary and increase over time. While the authors note many similarities between educational systems in the United States and Canada, one particular similarity is that these standardized measurements barely cover rigorous and quality instruction. They conclude such a leadership assessment lacks evidence in terms of usefulness, psychometric use, and instrument accuracy.

A more holistic evaluation system may yield more accurate results. A more promising route seems to be creating validated measures that attempt to account for much of the school-, district, and state-level factors with which school leaders must contend. Using propensity score matching, Corcoran, (2017) developed a potential evaluation of graduates from a principal preparation programs in terms of student achievement. While developing this system, he concluded that evaluating contextually responsive leadership practices rather than one best practice presents a more accurate evaluation system.

A more nuanced evaluation system also seems stronger when using previous empirical work. Based on Marzano's (2003) high-impact strategies framework, Shen et al., (2012) developed an instrument to test the importance of data-informed decision making, the role of principals in school effectiveness, and high-impact strategies for raising student achievement. After collecting data from 256 school leaders in Michigan, the instrument had both high reliability along with construct and factorial validity. Better still may be the mixing of methods to explore factors that are clearly associated with student achievement. After using hierarchical linear modeling to confirm the effect of teacher collective efficacy on student achievement, focus groups revealed the importance of school principals in supporting teacher collaboration and peer observation as well as a sustained focus on instructional improvement (Goddard, et al., 2017). When applying the conceptual framework outlined above, attempting to understand school leader effects in terms of culturally responsive school leadership seems a prudent path forward for those researching school leadership.

# Understanding How Culturally Responsive School Leadership Functions for Students With Limited Cultural Capital

As demonstrated above, exactly how principals impact student learning is often unclear. In the review of the literature above, we saw those practices that seem to impact student learning the most are building teachers' capacity (Youngs & King, 2002), cultivating a positive school climate (Matthew A. Kraft et al., 2016), and enacting instructional leadership (Goddard et al., 2015).

These leadership practices correspond with many of the best practices we have for serving students lacking cultural capital once practioners and researchers consider cultural competency as part of leadership practice (see Table 2.4). Building teacher capacity includes educators overcoming personal biases against marginalized students (Albritton, et al., 2017; Bertrand, et al., 2018; Bornstein & Manaseri, 2018; Bustamante & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Ishimaru, 2015; Jones & Ringler, 2017; O'Malley & Capper, 2014). Researchers have argued that cultivating a positive school climate can begin with identifying and dismantling barriers for student success (C. W. Cooper, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; M. Khalifa, 2010). Furthermore, by using a lens of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), leaders are better positioned to support the instructionally support marginalized students (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Khalifa, 2011; Larson, et al., 2018; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018; Portes, et al, 2017; Wiggan & Watson, 2016). These practices also offer the potential to increase student success for marginalized students, but a lack of large-scale, quantitative research creates difficulties for researchers, policymakers, and educators attempting to generalize to larger populations.

Effective Leadership	Effective Culturally
Practice	Responsive Leadership
	Practice
Building teachers' capacity (Youngs & King, 2002)	Educators overcoming personal biases against marginalized students (Khalifa, 2011)
Cultivating a positive school climate (Matthew A. Kraft et al., 2016)	Identifying and dismantling barriers for student success

	(Darling-Hammond, et
	al., 2007)
Instructional leadership	Culturally responsive
(R. Goddard et al.,	instructional leadership
2015)	(Marshall & Khalifa,
	2018)

Table 2-4: General leadership practices compared to CRSL.

#### An Overview of Research Concerning Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Based on keywords in articles highlighted by the Leadership for Social Justice SIG of AERA, I used the keywords "school administrator", "school leader", "Black student\*", "Latinx student\*", "Indigenous student\*", "Queer student\*", "minoritized student" "marginalized student\*" "race", and "education", to conduct a systematic review of the empirical studies concerning school leadership focused on serving marginalized students well. Given the demographic changes discussed earlier, I focused on studies completed in the last ten years. After excluding studies that were not peer reviewed and did not include the United States, I had 41 articles for review. Of these articles, 90% cited two studies that had not originally appeared in my search. Because so many articles cited these studies, I decided to include them. This process left me with 43 studies to analyze.

### Types of Studies

Knowing the methodologies of these studies can provide an important snapshot of the landscape of research into leadership supporting marginalized students. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods work support separate worldviews and also provide different types of conclusions in terms of generalizability, validity, and reliability (Creswell, 2014). Of the 43 studies analyzed here, the plurality are qualitative in nature, including case studies (Albritton et al., 2017; Alem, 2009; C. W. Cooper, 2009; DeMatthews, 2015; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018; Miller et al., 2014; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), (auto)ethnographies (Dailey, 2015; Flessa, 2009; Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa, 2011), phenomenological studies (Taysum, 2013), and general qualitative analysis (Allen, et al., 2017; Bornstein & Manaseri, 2018; Brooks, Arnold, & Brooks, 2013; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). A few mixedmethods studies offer empirical study of leadership practices supporting marginalized students as explanatory sequential designs (Bertrand et al., 2018; Bustamante Dr. et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, & Friedlaender, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Only four studies used quantitative methods, three of which focused on surveys of leadership practices (Jones & Ringler, 2017; O'Malley & Capper, 2014; Sherman, et al., 2011) while only one used difference-in-difference causal inference methods to determine how school leaders act toward marginalized students (Cárdenas & Ramírez de la Cruz, 2017). These methodological gaps suggest a need for more quantitative, generalizable work.

Sample Populations of Studies. Current research focuses primarily on urban Black students in New York along with other unnamed locations. There is also some work on Latinx students. Indigenous students and rural students lack voices in the literature (Albritton et al., 2017) as do Queer students (O'Malley & Capper, 2014), students with disabilities (Bornstein & Manaseri, 2018), and students with multiple ethnic and racial backgrounds. The choices raise many questions about how well the literature regarding CRSL reflects more groups throughout the United States.

#### Findings Related to CRSL

The analyzed studies offered three culturally responsive school leadership practices particularly relevant to the work of understanding student sorting. Working with educators to overcome biases, identifying and dismantling marginalized students' barriers to success, and enacting culturally responsive school leadership all seem to pay dividends in terms of student outcomes.

Educators Overcoming Biases. CRSL can be difficult to accomplish in many public school contexts as researchers found in a survey of school leaders in two western states in which a majority of respondents exhibited personal biases toward marginalized students (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). According to the researchers, these biases manifested in a lack of understanding how to engage with students' cultures and how to celebrate what students already knew. These biases can in turn hamper student learning (Khalifa, 2011).

Several studies also found that principals often overlooked marginalized students in educational planning. Queer students (Albritton et al., 2017; O'Malley & Capper, 2014) and students with disabilities (Bornstein & Manaseri, 2018) were particularly overlooked. For example, school leaders in one urban school district "almost exclusively" had deficit frameworks through which they saw what children could not do instead of what they could do (Flessa, 2009, p. 334).

Research concerning principals has also reported biased deficit mindsets toward parents, too (Bertrand et al., 2018). This mindset is detrimental to marginalized students' education because parental involvement is one of the most important factors in student educational outcomes (Benner et al., 2016) but parents who are vilified by school administrators are less likely to be involved (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Engaging with traditionally marginalized parents can provide more supportive classrooms that in turn benefited more students (Ishimaru, 2015). Another leader worked with parents to create more inclusive classrooms by increasing volunteering, addressing deficit perspectives, and improving support structures such as the school's IEP process (DeMatthews, 2015). Identifying and Dismantling Barriers to Marginalized Students' Success. When school leaders cannot see the barriers to marginalized students' success, these students' educations suffer. In another ethnography, Khalifa (2010) found leaders in one district "could not recognize (and thus could not validate) any types of capital aside from that associated with traditional students in the dominant culture" (p.631). Even when principals espouse CRSL, they may exhibit contradictions, such as in schools that practice exclusionary tracking programs (Brooks et al., 2013; C. W. Cooper, 2009). A CRSL practice would embrace detracking and provide a desegregated and enriching classroom for every student.

**Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership.** Another key CRSL practice is culturally responsive instructional leadership, which encourages teachers to work against their own biases and societal barriers to student learning (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). In one ethnographic study, Khalifa (2011) found white teachers were more likely than Black teachers to engage in deal-making with students, which allowed Black students to disengage from school. The culturally responsive school leader studied implemented several policies, such as not allowing students to leave class at will, while openly discussing at faculty meetings the racist implications of having lower expectations for Black students. A larger study of an entire school district found culturally responsive instructional leaders can have significant impact in promoting culturally relevant pedagogy (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018), which can in turn positively impact student achievement (Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

Culturally responsive instructional leadership also challenges notions of the dominant culture as the solely "successful" one (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). In one randomized controlled trial, researchers found English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in classes where the teacher

implemented culturally responsive practices had higher test scores than ELLs randomly assigned to teachers not implementing culturally relevant practices (d=.17, p $\le .001$ ) (Portes et al., 2017).

Culturally responsive practices can also lead to improved student behavior, according to Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, and Day-Vines (2018), who used structural equation modeling to find that one standard deviation change in observed CRT practices was associated with a .12-point increase in observer ratings of positive student behavior. Qualitative work has also shown similar results as demonstrated by Wiggan and Watson (2016), whose case study demonstrated that culturally relevant practices had a positive impact on student achievement because students felt pushed to do their best in a supportive environment which embraced their cultural identities.

School leaders who foster these practices in their faculty by embracing culturally responsive instructional leadership may realize these gains for students as well. One such example of culturally responsive school leadership that can pay dividends for student outcomes is eschewing traditional student sorting systems for those that place all students in enriching, challenging courses without culturally unresponsive gatekeeping mechanisms. This system is typically known as detracking.

#### **Establishing An Understanding of Tracking and Detracking**

Tracking is the policy of sorting students by academic ability (Oakes, 2005). Exactly who defines student ability and sorts students varies from school to school, but tracking often breaks down along lines of race and socioeconomic background rather than students' actual abilities in a given subject (Burris, 2014). Understanding the historical context of tracking can help place the policy in appropriate conversation with school leaders' attempts to undo the mismatch of student ability and student class placement (Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

Tracking first became popular with the advent of the modern high school in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Tyack, 1974). These tracks were quite rigid and typically divided students into two groups: those with college aspirations and those who would go on to learn a trade. Following the Supreme Court decision of Brown v. Board, many school divisions turned to tracking within schools as a way to separate students of color from white students (Oakes, 2005). Tracking can exist by separating students into vocational and college-preparatory schools (Lewis & Cheng, 2006), individual class levels within-schools (Chmielewski et al., 2013) or grouping students by ability within the class room–more commonly known as ability grouping (Clarke et al., 2003). Educators implementing tracking seem unable to divorce the policy from its historical antecedents as students of color and those with low socioeconomic backgrounds remain more likely to be placed in lower-level classes (Archbald et al., 2009) while wealthy, white students are more likely to be placed in upper-level classes (Archbald & Farley-Ripple, 2012), even when controlling for prior achievement (Corra, 2011) and using school fixed effects to account for different sorting systems (J. Grissom et al., 2019).

Beginning in the 1980s, advocates began calling for tracking reform, noting that students in "lower" tracks were often denied access to a rigorous education (Oakes, 2005). In the 1980s through the early 2000s, a movement to dismantle this system emerged: detracking. Detracking aims to create academically heterogeneous classrooms with high expectations and strong supports for all students (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005). In detracked classrooms, students learn together regardless of perceived ability level or previous achievement (Tomlinson et al., 2008). Detracking may look different in different schools. In one medium-sized comprehensive high school on Long Island, for example, all students are required to take rigorous International Baccalaureate courses. At this school, the number of students earning higher-level diplomas has increased since leaders instituted this requirement, particularly for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (Burris & Murphy, 2014). A meta-analysis of detracking studies also found that students in detracked schools perform significantly better academically than similar students in tracked schools by using both in a fixed-effects model (d=0.087, p $\leq$  .001) and a random effects model (d=0.202, p<.01) to analyze study outcomes (Rui, 2009). In both models, students previously in lower-tracked courses had particularly positive effects (dfixed=0.113, p $\leq$  .001; drandom= 0.283, p<.005).

#### **Exploring Tracking and Detracking Research**

In the course of this section, we will see how both tracking and detracking policy vary widely across the United States (Harris, 2011) and that while some researchers have found that tracking can provide important instructional access for students in both high- and low-level classes (Domina, et al., 2015; Steenbergen-Hu, et al., 2016), others suggest positive outcomes for students in detracked classes (Burris, 2014;Burris & Welner, 2005; Horn, 2010). While the existing evidence points to detracking as a policy that can potentially help educators overcome the opportunity gaps that marginalized students face, the evidence does not yet provide a clear direction for how to implement this policy.

Because the 2001 re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) changed the landscape of education reform, including the discussions about the practice of detracking (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; Watanabe, 2008), this analysis will focus on studies conducted after NCLB's passage. Based on the most common keywords used in articles promoted by the tracking/detracking special interest group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), I used the search phrases detrack\*", "detrack\*", "track\*", "track system (Education)" and "heterogeneous grouping" to find peerreviewed scholarly articles published between 2002 (a calendar year after the passage of NCLB) and 2019. Using the EBSCO database to search seven education-related databases, I found over 1000 peer-reviewed articles. After removing opinion pieces, articles ultimately unrelated to tracking and detracking, and studies done outside of the United States, 75 articles remained for this analysis (see Table 2.5).

Database	Search Terms	Limits	Search Results	Possible Articles
EBSCO	detrack* OR de- track*	2002-2018 All text Scholarly (peer- reviewed)	970	45
EBSCO	Heterogenous Grouping	2002-2018 Subject terms Scholarly (peer- reviewed)	244	4
EBSCO	Track System (Education)	2002-2018 Subject terms Scholarly (peer- reviewed)	782	11
PsycINFO	detrack* OR de- track*	2002-2018 Any field Scholarly (peer- reviewed)	9	2
JSTOR	detrack* OR de- track*	2002-2018 Education-related journals Articles	158	43

Table 2-5: Databases, search parameters, and results regarding tracking and detracking.

The contours of tracking and detracking policies. Because of the decentralized nature of school systems within the United States, researchers struggle to quantify the number of students learning in tracked or detracked systems (Kelly, 2007). Of the national datasets collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, only two ask questions about course levels within public schools: the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the National Teacher and Principal

Survey (NTPS). Both the SASS and NTPS ask whether or not schools have honors courses or a gifted program. While the wording of these questions is imprecise in terms of their relationship to student sorting, responses can give researchers an overview of tracking and detracking over time throughout the country. According to these two surveys, the percentage of schools with honors or gifted programs has slightly increased while those without honors or gifted programs have decreased (see Figure 2.2). These numbers are in line with the work of Lewis and Cheng (2006), who found 45.7% of school principals reported not organizing their schools by track in a survey of 665 secondary schools. Because this survey relied on self-reporting and definition of tracking, these numbers are also imprecise.



# \*represents NTPS data while other years represent SASS data Figure 2-2: Percentage of schools with honors/gifted programs over time.

Another weakness of the currently available statistics regarding tracking is that tracking

can still exist without a separate honors or gifted program in the form of ability grouping (Clarke

et al., 2003), and detracking can exist when an honors or gifted program is open to all students (Domina, et al., 2016). Thus, these numbers can provide an imperfect picture of the state of tracking and detracking. However, work done by Sebastian, Thornton, and McCarthy (under review) suggests that schools have more levels of courses as they become more diverse (see again Figure 1.1). In conceptualizing these findings, two continua emerge that blend to make four quadrants related to heterogeneity and detracking.

In the first quadrant are schools that are racially heterogeneous and offer a program of detracking. These schools may have open-access advanced courses, advanced courses for all, or some other student sorting system that does not limit students' options. Based on the previous research cited above, we would expect to see fewer schools in this quadrant.

In the second quadrant are schools that are more racially heterogeneous and offer fewer detracking options than the schools in the first or fourth quadrants. These schools may have more barriers to entry for higher level courses or limit students' options in other ways. Based on the previous research cited above, we would expect to see more schools in this quadrant.

In the third quadrant are schools that are more racially homogenous and also offer fewer detracking options that schools in the first or fourth quadrants. Similar to schools in the second quadrant, these schools may have more barriers to entry for higher level courses or limit students' options in other ways. Based on the previous research cited above, we would expect to see fewer schools in this quadrant.

In the fourth quadrant are schools that are racially homogenous and also offer more detracking options than schools in the second or third quadrants. Similar to schools in the first quadrant, These schools may have open-access advanced courses, advanced courses for all, or some other student sorting system that does not limit students' options. Based on the previous research cited above, we would expect to see more schools in this quadrant.

Methodological choices. Despite these limitations outlined above and using data primarily collected since the enactment of NCLB, I was able to review 75 empirical studies explicitly addressing tracking or detracking in the United States. In this case, empirical studies are classed as those in which researchers posited at least one research question and analyzed data in pursuit of answering that question (Creswell, 2014). Of these studies, sites primarily included large urban settings across the nation. A smaller number leveraged large regional or national datasets while some included international comparisons.

Researchers studying tracking and detracking were nearly split in their methodological choices. Quantitative studies made up 46.05% of the studies while qualitative studies made up 44.73%. Only seven (9.25%) of the analyzed studies used mixed-methods research practices. The majority of articles (55.32%) had either a negative conclusion about tracking or a positive view of detracking. This orientation of the literature still allowed for a great deal of discontinuity among findings.

Of the articles within this analysis, eleven attempted to use regression or correlation to understand student achievement outcomes. One study carried out in Chicago found requiring all students to complete algebra and English I by the end of ninth grade meant that while more students entered their sophomore year with credits in those subjects, failure rates increased, grades slightly declined, test scores did not improve, and students were no more likely to enter college (Allensworth et al., 2009). Adding a double-douse of algebra for every ninth grader in this program, however, resulted in significant positive impacts on credits earned, test scores, high school graduation, and college enrollment rates (Cortes et al., 2015). After implementing California's algebra for all program, at least one middle school saw that while students were more likely to take higher-level math classes, achievement growth slowed, and students' scores on tenth-grade math tests declined (Domina et al., 2014).

Other test-based analyses demonstrated similarly mixed outcomes. An ANOVA analysis of student test scores demonstrated a significant difference in outcomes after a school implemented detracking but this study provided no control group to account for student growth that may have happened organically (Freedman et al., 2005). Using an interrupted time-series design, researchers found that after Michigan educators implemented a statewide college-preparatory program for all students, students improved on the science section of the ACT by .2 points as a result of the curriculum (Jacob et al., 2017). The authors present evidence, however, that the curriculum hurt graduation rates for students who were the least prepared for college prep work before the curriculum change.

**Tracking and Detracking Study Findings and Conclusions.** While five studies suggested that tracking may provide benefits to students, the majority suggested either that tracking is detrimental to student learning or that detracking can be beneficial. Within the analyzed studies, 54 had authors who presented findings that were either negatively oriented toward tracking or positively oriented toward detracking (or both). Only one study presented negative findings regarding detracking while 16 studies had findings with a mixed or neutral orientation.

*Positive Impacts of Tracking.* Tracking may benefit both high- and low-achieving students, although researchers have not determined a causal mechanism for this benefit. Outcomes of 13 ability grouping meta-analyses showed that students benefited from within-class grouping ( $0.19 \le g \le 0.30$ ), cross-grade subject grouping (g = 0.26), and special grouping for the

gifted (g = 0.37), but did not benefit from between-class grouping ( $0.04 \le g \le 0.06$ ); the effects did not vary by student ability (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). In some high-incomes schools, ability grouping may improve achievement for all students ( $\beta$ =3.55, d=.31, p<.01) (Nomi, 2010).

*Negative Impacts of Tracking*. The largest negative impact of tracking seems to be the ways in which it furthers societal inequalities. For example, one international comparison found that tracking was largely based on parental education level rather than students' demonstrated skills (Brunello & Checchi, 2007). In terms of school leadership, one survey of principals' in the U.S. found that race and socio-economic status "significantly influence" track assignment (Lewis & Cheng, 2006). In their likelihood ratio test, Lewis and Change found parental income (p=.02), being of African descent (p=.03), and being Indigenous (p=.04) all meant that students were significantly more likely to be assigned to a lower track than other students. A recent meta-analysis of 35 articles concerning tracking also found that tracking was more likely to reinforce socioeconomic status than detracking (Striethold et al., 2019).

*Positive Impacts of Detracking.* Schools across the United States have attempted to address some of these negative impacts of tracking programs by turning to detracking–often with positive results. A case study of a detracking program found that students achieved more equitable outcomes on tests and also increased "relational equity"–a term that encompasses appreciating the work of "different cultural groups, genders, and attainment levels" (Boaler, 2006, p.40)– in their classrooms. A logistic regression of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth demonstrated that college preparatory coursework in heterogeneous settings may have helped women avoid receiving welfare (Beattie, 2011).

*Negative Impacts of Detracking.* Detracking does not provide, however, the panacea that some might hope as some studies suggest that enrolling more students in higher-level courses

can actually lead to worse outcomes. One study of California's algebra for all policy found that enrolling more students in advanced courses has negative average effects on students' achievement, driven by negative effects in large districts (Domina, et al., 2015). These findings are replicated by other scholars who found that accelerating algebra to middle school appears benign or beneficial for higher-performing students but unambiguously harmful to the lowest performers (Clotfelter et al., 2015).

*Mixed Findings.* Several studies had results that suggested intensifying curriculum by requiring certain levels of a subject by a certain grade (i.e. ninth-grade algebra-for-all initiatives) could reduce inequality in classroom assignment (Allensworth et al., 2009) or even increase test scores (Nomi & Allensworth, 2013). However, some of these attempts at course intensification merely meant the creation of a new high track for privileged students (Domina, et al., 2016). Another similar initiative was confusing for teachers and a lack of support and oversight allowed their preconceived notions about students and their work ethic to flourish (Harris, 2012). These findings suggest that simple detracking and course intensification by themselves will not universally increase student achievement.

*Neutral Findings*. Archbald and Farley-Ripple (2012) found that without controlling for prior achievement, students of color and students with lower socioeconomic status have a lower probability of being placed in upper-level math classes. When controlling for prior achievement, however, these disparities are no longer present. Their logistic regression used test scores and grades as independent variables rather than exploring the ways in which they may be affected by students' marginalized statuses with interaction terms using these covariates.

There may also be a relationship between community demographics and principals' attitudes toward tracking (Biafora & Ansalone, 2008). While 86.6% of principals on Long Island

rated themselves as proficient in the literature on tracking, just 3% thought the literature had favorable findings concerning detracking. The authors also found principals at schools where students had lower socioeconomic statuses were "more tolerant and supportive of tracking" than principals in middle- and high-income communities. Principals from lower-income communities also stated that students, parents, and teachers had less influence on the tracking process than principals in higher-income communities.

# Detracking as a Potential Culturally Responsive School Leadership Action

When it comes to school leadership, decisions regarding student sorting is a complex endeavor. Researchers cannot say with certainty exactly how school leaders impact student learning nor can they define exactly how sorting students influences academic and socialemotional outcomes. None of the studies explored the necessary and sufficient conditions for students to be organized without negatively impacting their futures. Furthermore, researchers overlooked discussions of school leaders' role in creating equitable access to rigorous curriculum with the exception of four articles (Bair & Bair, 2011; Biafora & Ansalone, 2008; Lewis & Cheng, 2006;Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). This study will focus on school leaders given their impact on student outcomes through their direct impact on teacher practices and the school culture (Seashore Louis, et al., 2010).

Further examining relationships and causal mechanisms between detracking students and outcomes can help policy makers and educators make more informed choices about student sorting in their particular contexts, including community reactions (Diamond & Lewis, 2015). In considering these contexts, future work should examine what necessary and sufficient factors must exist in successful detracking work, such as providing supports for students traditionally in lower-tracked classes as well as opportunities to stretch for students who are ready to do so.

Enumerating these factors might help school leaders make sorting and curriculum decisions while complementing existing descriptions of classroom practice. No matter where the field of equitable school leadership research goes, no one should assume that the purpose of detracking is universally accepted or that school-level decision makers explicitly know how to implement such a pedagogical perspective without clear supports.

This study also includes the considerations of all students lacking in cultural capital in order to create school environments that actually serve them rather than replicate the inequality they already experience. As Sleeter (2012) points out and the literature review above demonstrates, there is also a paucity of empirical research concerning leadership practice for specifically supporting marginalized student populations. This lack of understanding concerning which school leadership practices lead to positive student outcomes expands to the general literature on how principals impact student achievement (J. A. Grissom et al., 2015; Witziers et al., 2003). There is also a lack of quantitative studies that are generalizable to a larger population (Creswell, 2014) and more causal analysis that can provide educators with informed estimates of how to spend their time (Angrist & Pischke, 2015). Filling these gaps in the existing research base can positively inform leadership policies and practices to support marginalized students lacking cultural capital.

This suggestion will be difficult to carry out given the effect race and socioeconomic status seem to have on the standardized tests so many quantitative studies use to determine student achievement (White et al., 2016). Perhaps this work should begin with an effort to define achievement within the framework of CRSL and then to create a composite variable measuring this achievement within quantitative work. These gaps in generalizable studies also create a need for more studies to give examples of school leaders successfully undertaking CRSL through detracking. With the quantitative phases of this study, I aim to fill some of these gaps.

**Building on Cases of Detracked Schools.** Despite the gap in generalizable studies, there are myriad case studies of schools using detracking resulting in positive student outcomes. South Side High School on New York's Long Island, for example, has detracked with the effect of 82% of African American students earning honors-level diplomas compared to just 13% of African American students throughout New York State (Burris & Welner, 2005). In a comparative case study, Boaler and Staples (2008) found that in the school implementing detracking in mathematics students learned more, enjoyed mathematics more and progressed to higher levels compared to the other two tracked schools in the study. Wantanabe and colleagues (Watanabe et al., 2007) found similar outcomes for students in a detracked chemistry program. By adding to this body of evidence with updated, quantitative work, researchers will support practices that challenge one group's dominance over others, celebrate the cultural capital all students bring to the classroom, and encourage these students to succeed with high instructional expectations coupled with strong supports. This work has the possibility to help students with limited cultural capital overcome the gaps in opportunities to learn inherent in unequal tracking systems.

#### Chapter 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Study Overview**

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking. A mixed methods case study design allowed me to gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data concurrently to generate cases. This initial data analysis also allowed for the bounding of the cases based on student diversity and level of detracking. I gathered qualitative data from teacher and building-level leaders in order to examine how school leaders are fostering detracking. I also gathered quantitative data at each case site in order to better understand student outcomes. Both forms of data collection helped not only in site selection but also in developing an in-depth understanding of the cases and drawing meaningful implications for detracking practice. This in-depth exploration will eventually result in the development of a conceptual model for detracking. Moreover, it will serve as the basis for future research and development work, including the development of a de-tracking self-evaluation tool for school leaders and the validation of a survey instrument designed to help school leaders implement research-based detracking practices in their schools.

Chapter 2 discussed the study's conceptual framework, which integrated the historical and structural perspectives on tracking and detracking decisions school leaders make using Sorensen's analysis of student sorting as a starting point. The foregrounding of culturally relevant school leadership along with cultural reproduction and Critical Race Theories led to consulting (a) the literature on the challenges of integrating culturally relevant school leadership in various contexts and (b) the literature on the principal effects on student learning since these effects are the unit of analysis.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 also revealed that few studies have examined the roles principals play in successful detracking programs or the causal mechanisms of student outcomes in these programs. Student sorting is a complex endeavor, and researchers cannot say with certainty what impact sorting students has on academic and social-emotional outcomes. Thus, researchers find it difficult to answer clearly what research on school leaders use of sorting systems tells us about supporting student learning and equitable outcomes-particularly for marginalized student populations. None of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 touched on the necessary and sufficient conditions for students to be organized without negatively impacting their futures. Furthermore, researchers overlooked discussions of school leaders' role in creating equitable access to rigorous curriculum with the exception of four articles (Bair & Bair, 2011; Biafora & Ansalone, 2008; Lewis & Cheng, 2006; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Future work examining student sorting should include school leaders given their impact on student outcomes through their direct impact on teacher practices and the school culture (Seashore Louis, Dretzke, et al., 2010). Thus, there exist gaps in the literature for considering principals' actions in detracking programs, particularly as a vehicle for increasing positive student outcomes.

Based on these gaps, this chapter outlines this study's research design and methodology. This chapter includes the study's mixed methods design and rationale, the method of site selection and choosing participants, data sources and access, data collection and analysis procedures, and plans to protect the validity and trustworthiness of potential findings. This chapter continues with a statement addressing researcher biases and ethical concerns and concludes with a brief discussion of both the study's limitations and potential significance to the field of educational leadership.

#### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

Given the aforementioned gaps in the literature, this study addresses the following research questions in order to examine school principals' actions within the context of high-performing detracking programs as measured by student outcomes:

Research Question 1: How do school leaders foster detracking in their schools?Research Question 2a: What student outcomes exist in detracking programs?Research Question 2b: How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracking programs?

# **Research Design**

#### **Contextual Factors**

Creswell (2014) suggests that a study's conceptual framework ought to drive the creation of research questions, which in return drives the study's research design and methodology. In practice, however, this process is much messier than anticipated. An initial interest in detracking student outcomes led to reviewing existing theories on leadership for marginalized students within high schools. This review then led to the creation of research questions and continued readings on detracking, the relationship between principal actions and student outcomes, and theories concerning leadership for marginalized students. These readings supported revisions both to the conceptual framework for the study and the proposed research questions.

The study's conceptual framework involves understanding the negative influence of societal factors on student sorting and how principals successfully subverting these factors act. Therefore, it will be necessary to collect data about detracking programs' organization, principals' actions within those programs, and how students fare within these programs.

The first and second research questions call for gathering data about school leaders' actions within detracking programs, detracking program structures, and student outcomes. The

third research question calls for merging the data collected while examining the first two questions and searching for continuity and discontinuity among the findings.

The literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrates significant gaps in the knowledge base concerning principals' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs. When faced with this lack of existing literature, Rossman and Rallis (2003) recommend engaging in exploratory research "in the field" (p. 9) in order to develop an understanding of complex phenomena. Qualitative research methods, including interviews and observations, can provide researchers with a "rich, thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of these phenomena. Quantitative methods can, in turn, provide detailed information, descriptions, and relationships that may differ from assumed conventional wisdom (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). Quantitative methods inference can also provide researchers with detailed statistical information about a population (Angrist & Pischke, 2015).

Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) suggest that merging qualitative and quantitative methods within a single mixed methods study can improve research quality not only because both methods leverage different advantages of understanding human phenomena but also because in the merging of the methods, researchers can understand different facets of the same problem. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) contend that this type of research allows for the development of more comprehensive understandings in answering various research questions. These mixed methods studies are situated within the pragmatist research paradigm, which seeks to understand what works in terms of solving social problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

#### A Mixed Methods Approach
Because the purpose of this study is to identify and understand the meaningful factors of school leadership at work in the context of detracking, I used a mixed methods case study design during which I gathered and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data concurrently to generate cases. This initial data analysis allowed for the bounding of the cases based on student diversity and level of detracking. I then gathered qualitative data from teacher and building leaders in order to examine how school leaders are fostering detracking. I next gathered quantitative data at each case site in order to better understand student outcomes. Both forms of data collection helped in developing an in-depth understanding of the cases and to draw meaningful implications for detracking practice. This in-depth exploration will also eventually result in the development of a conceptual model for detracking. Moreover, it will serve as the basis for future research and development work, including the development of a de-tracking self-evaluation tool for school leaders and the validation of a survey instrument designed to help school leaders implement research-based detracking practices in their schools. A convergent mixed methods design (see again Figure 1.2) was used to first explore these actions qualitatively at each of the case study sites and then to quantitively explore student outcomes (QUAL+quan).

### **Site Selection**

This study used a purposeful "extreme case sample" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Before embarking upon site selection, I first used existing datasets to examine current student sorting practices. The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) provides information about honors courses offered along with school demographic information that is often related to tracking–race (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016a), socioeconomic status (Oakes, 2005), and the racial diversity of each school (Sebastian, Thornton, and McCarthy, under review). I used this data to further understand the demographic makeup of schools operating without explicit honors courses. Examination of this SASS data, and potentially other databases, provided an overview of student sorting practices that may exist, which further informed my inclusion criteria and site selection process.

By working with the Tracking/Detracking Special Interest Group at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), I then identified several exemplary detracking program. The selected schools were in at least the third year of implementing detracking as the three-year mark is often when schools enter a "sustaining" phase of reform (Bryk et al., 2010) in which the pace of change moderates (Duke & Landahl, 2011).

A preliminary review of programs of study in Virginia suggested that racial diversity was a significant predictor of the number of levels of courses offered (Sebastian, et al., under review). After calculating a diversity index (d-index) similar to Kelly and Price (2011), my colleagues and I found that the difference between a d-index of 0.00 and a d-index of 1.00 is 0.71 levels per course when controlling for poverty and district size. This finding suggests that in schools with a mix of white students and students of color, tracking becomes more prevalent. As such, this finding suggests some initial inclusion criteria for creating comparative case studies among schools functioning at different levels of detracking with different diversity measures. In this study, each school functioned as an exploratory case (Yin, 2018) within each of the identified quadrants (see again Figure 3.1). These quadrants are designed to introduce variations that enable helpful comparability. School D fell in the first quadrant. School B fell in the second quadrant. School C fell in the third quadrant. School A fell in the fourth quadrant.



Figure 3-1: Quadrants of detracking and racial diversity continua including studied school sites.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of school leaders' actions in which teacher and building leader interviews were collected at well-regarded detracking programs. Sorensen's framework discussed above provided a guide to this collection process while CRT undergirded interview protocols. The goal of this phase was saturation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) in understanding these behaviors from leaders' perspectives.

## Interviews

I first created interview protocols that combined my first round of data collection with the CRT tenants and organizational framework. I then conducted semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) of faculty members (see Table 3.1). At two schools, these interview subjects included solely the principal because of the strain COVID-19 placed on schools during the time of this study. At the other two schools, interview subjects included the principal (see Appendix B), assistant principals (see Appendix C), and four department chairs of core subjects and the head of each respective counseling department (see Appendix D). Using a standardized, open-ended interview process (Patton, 1990), I was able to further understand what

actions school leaders were taking in their detracking programs. CRT in particular provided a

means of helping to explore the racial implications of the leader's choices.

Interviewee	Sex	Race	Years Educator	Years in Current Position
School A Principal	М	White	20	7
School B AP1	F	White	15	4
School B AP2	М	Black	16	4
School B Counseling Chair	М	White	25	1.5
School B English Chair	F	White	19	6
School B Instructional Coach	F	White	14	10
School B Math Chair	F	White	15	9
		Black/Latin		
School B Principal	М	0	19	4.5
School B Science Chair	F	White	11	10
School B Social Studies				_
Chair	М	White	25	8
School C Principal	М	White	11	3
School D AP 1 (Counseling	Б	White	24	11
	Г	white	24	11
School D AP2	M	White	1/	6
School D AP3	М	White	21	21
School D AP4	F	White	27	27
School D English Chair	М	White	27	27
School D Math Chair	F	White	40	11
School D Principal	М	White	26	6
School D Science Chair	М	White	24	12
School D Social Studies Chair	F	White	24	13

Table 3-1: Demographics of interview participants.

As a result of the travel restrictions placed on most of the country during the period of this study, I was not able to visit the schools in person to conduct interviews as I had planned. Thus, I conducted interviews via Zoom (with two exceptions where the participants requested to speak by phone). Both Zoom and telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed. Zoom interviews allowed me to see the participant's reactions and non-verbal communication. Although nothing can take the place of meeting in person, doing so would have violated social distancing guidance.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

I used several methods of analysis for the collected qualitative data. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 formed a base for this analysis and helped me develop a conceptual framework to guide the initial analysis. Following initial analysis, the conceptual framework also provided guidance for deeper exploration of the data and creating evidenced-based conclusions bolstered by coding memos, member checking, and triangulation (Creswell, 2014).

## Coding

After transcribing an interview, I first conducted a round of *in vivo* coding (Creswell, 2014) to find emerging themes and patterns (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) concerning school leader behavior. This round of coding was inductive in nature as I was looking to see what themes and patterns would emerge when I compared the interview analyses to each other. I used the software NVivo program 12.6.1 to code my transcripts. Each individual sentence made up the unit of analysis for coding. In the event that multiple sentences constituted a complete thought, then I coded all of those sentences with the same code. Some sentences contained data for multiple codes, and I broke those sentences down. I coded each and every line of the interviews except for the questions. I synthesized and then saved the codes for each interview in a dedicated NVivo file. The software program produced a hierarchy map of all codes used during this round (see Figure 3.2). Each coding session concluded with a detailed analytic memo to maintain an audit trail and provide support for the emerging thematic analysis (Yin, 2018).



Following *in vivo* coding of an interview, I then conducted a round of coding for each of the theories supporting my conceptual framework: Sorensen's framework, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, CRT, culturally responsive school leadership, and opportunity to learn (see Appendix E). I paid special attention to the issue of interest convergence to remain aware of how detracking practices may explicitly or implicitly benefit white students over marginalized students. These five rounds of coding were all inductive in nature and used phrases from the theories themselves. After each round of coding, I wrote an analytic memo detailing my findings.

After completing framework coding, I compared these framework codes to the *in vivo* codes described above to begin to develop more complex findings for this phase of the study. I created several concept maps to help condense the emerging findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After completing all six rounds of coding for each of the 20 interviews, I then compared the concept maps and analytic memos and used them to provide evidence for the emerging findings.

## **Procedures for Establishing Trustworthiness**

This study took three main steps to establish trustworthiness: peer review and debriefing, triangulation, and creating an audit trail. With peer review and debriefing (Creswell, 2014), I

sought feedback from peers studying both detracking and school leadership. Collecting data from multiple sources–school leaders and teacher leaders–allowed for triangulation (Stake, 2004). Yin also recommends creating both a protocol and an audit trail to "make as many procedures as explicit as possible and to conduct research as if someone were looking over your shoulder" (2018, p. 46). I did just that by creating interview protocols along with writing detailed analytic memos after each round of data collection and coding. These organizational steps also helped establish trustworthiness within the study.

#### **Positionality**

An important fourth step for trustworthiness will be to explain my positionality as a researcher. Before becoming an academic researcher, I worked in two detracking programs at two different high schools as an English teacher. This experience lends itself to trust with participants with whom I have professional similarities, but it may also affect my analysis of the data. Peer review and debriefing, as described above, helped mitigate these concerns. My public participation in detracking programs may have also kept some teachers from sharing pro-tracking thoughts and feelings with me. The triangulation outlined above addressed this concern by providing additional data points from documents and additional interviews.

## **Quantitative Data Collection**

## **Descriptive Statistics**

Gathering quantitative data was an important part of my mixed methods study design because quantitative data can help to triangulate and verify the data collected during qualitative interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To that end, I sought to collect student test scores broken down by marginalized status and track assignment in order to better understand to what extent school leaders were facilitating student success in their detracking program. The abrupt closure of schools in March 2020 made this planned data collection impossible. To best understand what types of interim and alternative quantitative data I might collect, I analyzed the state report card of each school along with the data available from the federal Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights for the 2015-16 and 2017-18 school years. These years were the two most recent data collections and allowed for some comparison over time at each school. These descriptive statistics allowed for trendlines in terms of student outcomes relative to actions school leaders described taking at their schools.

## **Programs of Study**

Each studied school produced a program of studies. At each school, the document provides course summaries of all the classes offered at the school along with required prerequisites and corequisites. The program of studies also offers students additional resources for help with school and suggested tracks for students based on their college and career aspirations. Analyzing each program of studies, as discussed below, helped to quantify the actual tracks at work in each school.

#### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

### **Descriptive Statistics and Representative Indices**

**State Report Cards.** All of the schools in this study publish a school report card annually in some format. The most recent report card covers the 2018-19 school year and was released in 2019. Each state's report card offered similar data in terms of student information. For the purposes of this study, student demographics, student discipline, state test results broken down by student demographics, and graduation rates were the most salient.

Office of Civil Rights Data. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) releases civil rights data every other year. For 2017-18 school year, OCR collected data

concerning student enrollment, English Learner (EL) status, attendance, discipline reports, dual enrollment and credit programs, students with disabilities, athletics, credit recovery, staffing and finance, and college and career readiness. For the purposes of this study, I focused on student enrollment, English Learners, and college and career readiness. I analyzed this data on its own and then compared it to the previously-collected data from the 2015-16 school year.

**Representative Indices.** Another way to think about potential associations between principals' actions and student outcomes is to think about the Representation Index (RI) of students within advanced courses. An RI is the ratio of the proportion of students in a given category in advanced courses to the proportion of students from that given category in the school itself (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Thus, an RI gives an indication of how well students from various backgrounds are integrated into higher-level courses.

## **Programs of Study**

I coded each program of study based on the most common state-tested subjects. These varied a bit school-to-school because each state had slightly different requirements. The most frequently subjects, however, were English, Geometry, Algebra I, Algebra II, World History I, World History II, Biology, and Chemistry. I noted how many levels existed for each subject along with the breakdown of self-contained, remedial, standard, and honors classes. I also noted the number of prerequisites and corequisites for each course.

#### **Merging Datasets**

After completing the qualitative and quantitative data collection protocols described above, I then merged the two datasets. By integrating the results, I gained insight into how school leaders' foster successful student outcomes in detracking programs throughout the United States. I carried out this integration by considering each set of results separately in terms of each research question and then determined how the results confirmed, disconfirmed, or expanded upon each other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

## Limitations

Non-generalizability. This study, with its focus on four detracking schools, is not meant to provide generalizable results about school leadership, student outcomes, and detracking. Without larger datasets that could submit to statistical analysis, the results of this study are only descriptive in nature.

**Student Achievement Data.** Questioning assumptions of neutrality is crucial to the use of CRT in educational research, and the neutrality of student achievement data must submit to such questioning. Research in the future could seek to examine additional measures of student outcomes such as post-secondary plans, or even student-created measures using a participatory action researcher design (Creswell, 2014).

We Don't Know What We Don't Know. Researchers currently lack a formal census of schools throughout the United States implementing detracking programs. This lack of knowledge about detracking schools makes it impossible to know what might be a representative sample. The present study attempts to mitigate this concern by working with a national organization made up of detracking and tracking researchers from across the United States.

## Learning How School Leaders Behave in Detracked Schools

Building-level administrators often set the tone for a school building. Given what we know about the discriminatory nature of tracking programs (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005), principals have the opportunity to shape a more equitable sorting policy. Understanding how some school leaders have accomplished this feat in detracked schools can help other school administrators follow a similar path. To that end, Chapter 4 offers a contextual examination of

each of the selected school sites. In Chapter 5, I will explore the research findings brought about by the methods outlined above. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will discuss the implications of these findings for practioners, policymakers, and researchers who wish to advance the cause of more just school leadership.

## **Chapter 4 CASE CONTEXTS**

The units of analyses (Yin, 2018) for this study were four high schools across the United States. Yin suggests that in order to establish replication logic, researchers should establish a chain of evidence that links a study's findings to the data collected. In order to effectively describe the findings from the study, it is relevant to provide details about each school's environment during the study. In this chapter, I also offer an initial overview of the qualitative interviews conducted at each school in order to provide a thorough description of the detracking initiatives at each school.

	Detracking Type	Year Begun	School Setting	Interviews Conducted
School A	pre-IB for all	2014	Suburban	Principal
School B	Honors for all in core 9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> grade courses	2011	Urban (small city)	Principal, 2 assistant principals, counseling chair, English chair, Math chair, Science chair, Social studies chair
School C	Eliminated lowest track	2015	Suburban	Principal
School D	pre-IB for all, IB for most	2000	Suburban	Principal, 4 assistant principals, English chair, Math chair, Science chair, Social studies chair

Table 4-1: Site school overviews

#### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

Given the gaps discussed in the literature discussed in chapter 2, this study addressed the following research questions in order to examine school principals' actions within the context of high-performing detracking programs as measured by student outcomes. These research questions, and the interviews that proceeded from them, allowed for a great deal of variance in each school's detracking program:

1. How do school leaders foster detracking in their schools?

2a. What associations exist between school leaders' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs?

2b. How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracked programs?

## Case 1: School A

School A is a comprehensive public high school in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. It is part of a unified high school district that has five comprehensive public high schools and two charter high schools. Principal A was my first person interviewed for this project and the only person from his school. Thus, I relied heavily on information gathered by the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and data presented by the school's annual report card to learn more about the school's context.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

School A had 2067 student enrolled during the 2018-19 school year according to the state school accountability report card. This enrollment seems relatively stable when compared to the 2015-16 OCR data. The student demographics within that enrollment also seemed relatively stable from year to year.

## General Racial Demographics

During the 2018-19 school year, Latinx students made up 59.1% of the student body at School A. White students made up 28.2% while multiracial students made up 3.9% of students. Asian students were 3.4% of the student body, but the school report card did not distinguish between students from East Asia or South Asia. Students from Hawaii or the Pacific islands were 2.1% of the student body. There were 1.5% Filipino students and 1.4% of students were Black. Indigenous students made up 0.4% of the student body (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics).

#### **Other Demographics**

A majority of students experience economic oppression with 52.5% of the student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch. English language learners made up 19.5% of students, and 15.8% of students had a documented disability. Children in foster care made up 0.2% of the student body, and 0.7% of students experienced homelessness during the 2018-19 school year (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

## **Graduation Rates**

According to the school accountability report card, School A has experienced a slight decrease in graduation rates in the past three years (see Figure 4.1). In 2015-16, 91% of students graduated. In 2018-19, 86.6% of students graduated. White students continue to have the highest graduation rate of all demographic subgroups reported out over time.



Figure 4-1: School A graduation rate over time.

# **Program of Studies Analysis**

School A's program of studies covers the 2020-21 school year. The document provides course summaries of all the classes offered at the school along with required prerequisites and corequisites. The program of studies also offers students additional resources for help with school and suggested tracks for students based on their college and career aspirations.

Much of the tracking at School A is driven by sheltered classes for English Language Learners and students reading well below grade level. While the reading levels seem to most affect English course assignment, ELL students are placed in sheltered classes in a variety of subjects. Only one of the core tested subjects has one level (see Figure 4.2).



Figure 4-2: Levels by subject at School A

## Number of Levels by Subject and Grade

**English.** In English 9, students can be placed in five different levels. Three classes are for students at various below-grade level reading scores. One class is for students with limited English proficiency. The fifth class is an honors-level course designed to prepare students for the International Baccalaureate program. English 10 has five levels as well. There are two remedial level classes, one standard class, one ELL class, and one pre-IB class. In English 11, there are only three levels: standard, ELL, and IB.

Math. School A offers four levels of Algebra I: remedial, ELL, ELL remedial, and standard. There are four levels of geometry: remedial, support, accelerated (with algebra II), and ELL geometry. For Algebra II, students can be placed in a standard course or an accelerated course coupled with trigonometry.

**History.** For World History I, students have only one option. The second half of the course is waived for students in an English support course. For World History, II, however, students can be placed in a standard or pre-IB honors course. For US History, offered in eleventh grade, students can also be placed in a standard or IB course.

Science. School A does not offer an earth science course as many schools do for ninth grade. Instead, ninth graders are typically placed in biology. At School A, there are two biology courses for ELL students and one standard course. School A offers three levels of chemistry: one for ELL students, one standard course, and once honors IB course.

#### **Prerequisites and Corequisites**

Nearly all courses had some sort of prerequisite (see Figure 4.3). English and Math both relied primarily on district placement tests. Science courses primarily used grades and math enrollment. History was the only subject not to have prerequisites.

**English.** Students are placed in the remedial classes based on district-wide placement test scores. How students are defined as ELL is not clear in the program of studies. To go into the tenth grade pre-IP class students must complete the ninth grade pre-IB class with a C- or better or with a teacher recommendation. To enter the IB English 11 class, students must complete the tenth grade pre-IB class with a C- or better or with a teacher recommendation.

**Math.** Students are initially placed in classes based on district-wide placement test scores. To take standard geometry, students must have the requisite placement test score and passed Algebra I. To take honors geometry, students must pass Algebra I with an A- or better. The program of studies also notes the course "is for students who plan to major in math or science." Algebra II standard and honors both require students to pass their previous math class

with C- or better. To get into the honors course, however, students must also have a teacher recommendation.

**History.** The history courses do not have perquisites except for US History. This course requires that students are currently in eleventh grade to take the course.

Science. Biology does not have prerequisites except for ELL status for the ELL course. To enroll in standard chemistry, students must have completed Algebra I with a C- or better. To enroll in IB chemistry, students must be concurrently enrolled in Algebra II, Algebra II/Trig, or higher level math course. To enroll in the ELL course, students must have ELL status.



Prerequisites by Course

Figure 4-3: Prerequisites by course at School A.

## Types of Diplomas and Recommended Tracks

School A outlines ten different example "educational plans" in the program of studies. The first three are intervention-based plans and the remaining seven are different types of college preparatory tracks based on student interests. The final college preparatory track is the IB diploma track, which suggests students take pre-IB classes beginning in ninth grade.

## **IB Program**

## OCR Data

During the 2017-18 school year, 666 of the 2142 students were enrolled in the IB program. White students made up 38.3% of the IB program while multiracial students were 2.4%. Pacific Islanders made up 1.4% of the program, and Latinx students made up 51.5% of the program. Black students made up 1.7% of the program and Asian students were 5.3% of the IB enrollment. No Indigenous students were enrolled in the program. Relative to their populations in the school as a whole, white and Asian students were overrepresented and multiracial students were underrepresented. Pacific Islanders and Black students were represented at about the same rate (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of schools' advanced enrollment by race).

ELL students made up 3.6% of IB enrollees. Students with disabilities were 3.5% of the IB-enrolled population. Both of these groups were underrepresented compared to their overall population in the school. This version of the OCR data did not include students receiving free and reduced lunch in their IB enrollment data collection (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of schools' advanced enrollment by non-racial subgroups).

## **Representative Changes**

While underrepresentation continues to be a problem in the IB program, there are signs of improvement. A larger percentage of students were enrolled in the program in 2017-18. Asian, white, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and Black students all increased as a proportion of the program.

Indigenous students, however, did not enroll at all when in 2015-16, they made up 0.38% of the program.

# **College Admissions Testing**

## OCR Data

During the 2017-18 school year, 606 students at School A took the SAT or ACT or 28.29% of the school (see Table 4.2). Of those students, 40.8% were white while 1.8% were multiracial. Pacific Islanders made up 1.2% of college admissions test takers, and 47.9% were Latinx. Black students made up 2% of test takers, and 6.4% were Asian. No Indigenous students took college admissions test. Students learning English made up 6.8% test takers, and students with IDEA-defined disabilities 3.6%. OCR did not offer data for students with 504s or those receiving free and reduced lunch.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific	White	ELLs	SWD
					Islander			
2015-	5.81%	.93%	42.7%	7.2%	1.16%	42.09%	1.62%	5.2%
16								
2017-	6.4%	2%	47.9%	1.8%	1.2%	40.8%	6.8%	3.6%
18								

Table 4-2: College admissions test taking over time at School A.

## **Representative Changes**

The proportion of students taking a college admissions test increased from 20.70% in 2015-16 to 28.29% in 2017-18. Latinx, Black, and Asian students all had increases in their proportions of test takers. Pacific Islanders, white, and multiracial students all saw their proportions decrease. ELL students increased their proportion of test takers while the proportion of students with disabilities taking college admissions tests decreased.

#### Case 2: School B

School B is a comprehensive public high school in Central Virginia. It is part of a relatively small school district that has only one comprehensive public high school and one alternative high school. I interviewed Principal B, two assistant principals, one instructional coach, the chair of the school counseling department, and the chairs of the English, math, science, and social studies departments. I also used information gathered by the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and data presented by the school's annual state-mandated quality report to learn more about the school's context.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

School B had 1230 students enrolled during the 2018-19 school year. This enrollment was an increase of about 100 students from the 2015-16 OCR data. The student demographics also experienced a slight shift. From 2015-16 to 2018-19 there was an increase in the percentage of Hispanic, multiracial, and white students. In the same time period, there was a decrease in the percentage Asian and Black students. For the demographics below, I will use the 2018-19 numbers, unless otherwise noted.

#### General Racial Demographics

School B does not have any one group of students who make up the majority racial category (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics). White students were the largest group at 46.3% of the student body. Asian students were 5.7% of students while Black students made up 28.6% of the student body. Latinx or Hispanic students were 12.7% of the student body and multiracial students were 6.6% of the student body. There were too few American Indian or Pacific Islander students to report.

*Other Demographics.* The state quality report included socioeconomic demographics, language learning status, and students with disabilities. The report did not break these categories down further with other demographics. At School B, 38% of students experience economic oppression and are registered for free and reduced price lunch. English Language Learners (ELL) made up 11% of the student body. Students with disabilities were 14.2% of the student body (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

## **Graduation Rates**

**General.** According to the state quality profile, School B has enjoyed an increase in ontime graduation rates over time (see Figure 4.4). The graduation rate of 89.6% in 2017-18 increased to 95.7% in 2018-19. In the 2018-19 school year, Black students graduated on time at a rate of 95.9% while 90.9% of Hispanic students graduated on time. White students had an ontime graduation rate of 97.5% while 94.1% of Asian students graduated on time. Multiracial students graduated on-time at a rate of 92.9%. Students with disabilities graduated on time at a rate of 95.3% while 94.2% of economically oppressed students graduated on time. Only 81.5% of ELLs graduated on time.



Figure 4-4: School B graduation rates over time.

**Diploma Types**. The state of Virginia offers two types of diplomas: standard and advanced. To gain an advanced diploma, students must take advanced courses along with several years of a foreign language. At School B, 49.8% of the class of 2019 graduated with advanced diplomas while 45.9% graduated with standard diplomas (see Table 4.3). The remaining students either took a GED or some other certificate (2.5%) or dropped out (1.9%). Only 25.5% of Black students graduated with an advanced diplomas while 39.4% of Hispanic students did so. The numbers were nearly reversed for white students of whom 72.9% graduated with advanced diplomas. Within the Asian student population, 41.2% graduated with advanced diplomas while 57.1% of multiracial students did so. Of students with disabilities, 14% graduated with advanced diplomas while 23.3% of economically oppressed students did so. Within the ELL student population. 14.8% graduated with advanced diplomas.

Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
41.2%	25.5%	3.4%	57.1%	72.9%	14.8%	14.8%
<b>—</b> 11 1 2 <i>G</i>						•

*Table 4-3: School B class of 2019 advanced diploma designations.* 

## **Program of Studies Analysis**

School B's program of studies covers the 2020-21 school year and includes both the feeder upper elementary and middle schools. The document provides course summaries of all the classes offered at the school along with required prerequisites and corequisites. The program of studies also offers students additional resources for help with school and suggested tracks for students based on their college and career aspirations.

Similar to School A, this program of studies reveals a more complex tracking program than Principal B initially suggested. Much of the tracking at School B is driven by self-contained classes for students with special needs and multiple higher-level option. While special education needs seem to most affect English course assignment, students are placed in self-contained





Figure 4-5: Levels by subject at school B.

## Number of Levels by Subject and Grade

**English.** In English 9, students can be placed in one of three levels. There is a sheltered class for English Language Learners. English 9 is for students who struggle with reading while English 9 Honors Option is for everyone else. English 10 is separated in the same way. In eleventh grade, students may be placed in ESL English 11, English 11 year-round, English 11 semester, English 11 Honors Option, or AP English Language and Composition. The English 11 semester-long course is primarily for seniors attempting credit recovery.

**Math.** Algebra I has several remedial levels for students who either failed Algebra I in middle school or did not attempt it. Although both Principal B and Math Chair B highlighted

honors-option-geometry-for all, the program of studies still notes a separate geometry class. There is also a sperate Algebra II and Algebra II honors course.

Science. Biology was the only course to have honors-option listed as the sole option in the program of studies. This made biology the only completely detracked course. Chemistry had two levels: standard and honors.

**Social Studies.** Ninth graders at School B take world geography as opposed to world history. There are two levels of this subject: honors-for-all and Advanced Placement. World history, taken primarily by tenth graders, had two levels: standard and honors. United States history has three levels: standard, honors, and Advanced Placement.

## **Prerequisites and Corequisites**

Nearly two-thirds of courses had some sort of prerequisite (see Figure 4.6). English relied on completion of the previous grade's course and special status. Math courses with prerequisites also focused on completion of the previous course in a sequences while chemistry had different corequisites based on level. History and biology were the only subjects not to have prerequisites.



Figure 4-6: Prerequisites by course at School B.

**English.** The program of studies does not explain how students are placed in the ESL courses for their grade level. There is also no explanation for the different requirements to be placed in English 9 or English 9 Honors-Option. The same is true for English 10. In eleventh grade, students must complete English 10 and also have a counse1or recommendation to take the standard English 11 course. To take the Advanced Placement English course offered in eleventh grade requires a "high level of achievement in English 10 or English 10 Honors Option."

**Math.** In the math department, Algebra I placement is quite complicated. In addition to an option studies skill class, students may take a remedial class, a standard year-long class, or a standard semester-long class. Students in the remedial class must have a teacher recommendation and a 504 or IEP.

**Science.** As mentioned above, biology was the only truly detracked class in those analyzed. Students only have the option to take honors option biology. Thus, there is no prerequisite Standard chemistry requires co-enrollment Algebra, Functions, and Data Analysis or higher. Honors chemistry requires co-enrollment in Algebra II or higher.

**Social Studies.** Social studies courses were the only ones to lack pre- and co-requisites completely. For Advanced Placement United States history, the program of studies suggests concurrent enrollment in AP English Language and Composition but that enrollment is not required.

#### Types of Diplomas and Recommended Tracks

In some ways, School B is responding to the two diplomas offered by the state of Virginia: standard and honors. Unlike other schools, however, the program of studies does not seem to nudge students in one direction or the other. The program of studies does contain a pull out of all of the offered Advanced Placement courses. The school also offers an early college scholars option, designed by the state, that allows students to graduate with their associate's degree in partnership with the local community college provided they enroll in and pass required dual enrollment courses. These students would also earn an advanced diploma under the state scheme.

## **AP Program**

During the 2017-18 school year, 462 of the 1114 (41.47%) students were enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement class. Of those students, 4.8% were Asian and 11.7% were Black. Latinx students made up 7.4% of AP students while 3.9% were multiracial students. White students made up 72.3% of AP students. ELL students were just 0.2% of AP enrollees while students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 1.1%. Only white students were overrepresented in terms of AP enrollment. All other categories were underrepresented relative to their proportion of the student body (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of schools' advanced enrollment by race).

Looking at who stayed to take the AP exam in the spring, 5.5% were Asian and 7.1% were Black. Latinx students made up 5.5% of AP exam takers while 3.9% were multiracial. White students made up 78% of AP exam takers. Again, white students were overrepresented while all other student groups were underrepresented.

Compared to the 2015-16 OCR data, fewer students took AP courses in 2017-18 (45.9% to 41.47%). Most student groups experienced non-significant changes. Latinx students, however, went from making up 5% of AP enrollees to 7.4%. Multiracial students went from 2.9% to 3.9%. White students went from 75.6% to 72.3%. In terms of test taking, Black students went from 9.6% of test takers to 7.1% while Asian students went from 4.5% to 5.5%. Other subgroups stayed roughly the same.

## **College Admissions Test Taking**

## OCR Data

Of the entire student body in 2017-18, 25.49% took the SAT or ACT. Of these students, 3.9% were Asian, while 28.9% were Black. Latinx students made up 7% of college admission test takers while 3.9% were multiracial. White students made up 56.3% of these test takers. ELL students were 2.5% of test takers while 3.2% had IDEA-designated disabilities. Once again, white students were overrepresented while all other student groups were underrepresented.

### **Representative Changes**

The data in 2017-18 represented somewhat of an improvement in terms of representation (see Table 4.4) According to the OCR data, in 2015-16, white students made up 59.1% of SAT and ACT test takers. Multiracial students comprised 4.3% of this group while Hispanic students made up 3.3%. Of the college admissions test takers, 27.2% were Black and 5.3% were Asian. Enough Indigenous students took these tests to report out, and they made up 0.7% of the group.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
2015-16	5.3%	27.2%	3.3%	4.3%	59.1%	ND	ND
2017-18	3.9%	28.9%	7.0%	3.9%	56.3%	2.5%	3.2%

Table 4-4: College admission test taking over time at School B.

### Case 3: School C

School C is a comprehensive high school in southeastern Pennsylvania. It is part of a school district that serves a larger township. In the district, there are ten elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. Principal C was the second principal I interviewed for this project and the only person from his school. Thus, I relied heavily on information gathered by the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and data presented by the school's annual report card to learn more about the school's context.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

## **General Racial Demographics**

During the 2017-18 school year, School C enrolled 1224 students. Of those students, 8.2% were Asian, 5.6% were Black, 7.1% were Latinx, and 0.9% were multiracial. White students were 78.3% of the student body (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics).

## **Other Demographics**

Students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 12.6% of the student body, and 8.6% of students had 504-designated disabilities. No students qualified for free or reduced price lunch (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

**ELL students.** Of the entire student body, 2.2% were English Language Learners. White students made up 59.3% of ELLs while Latinx students were 25.9%. Asian and Black students both made up 7.4% each of ELLs at School C.

#### **Graduation Rates**

**General.** The four-year cohort graduation rate for School C in 2019 was 95.9%. Of Asian students, 100% graduated while 95.8% of Hispanic students did. Of white students, 97.3% graduated,, and 96.8% of Black students graduated. Economically oppressed students graduated at a rate of 78% while 75.7% of students with disabilities graduated (see Figure 4.8).



Figure 4-7: School C graduation rates over time.

**Diploma Strength.** The commonwealth of Pennsylvania measures "rigorous course of study" through Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate participation, college course enrollment, and a career and technical education program of study concentration. Per this measurement, School C has 26 rigorous courses with 79.1% of students enrolling in at least one during the 2018-19 school year (see Table 4.5). Of these students, 82.1% of white students were enrolled while 56.4% of economically oppressed students were. Of students with disabilities, 41.5% were in a rigorous course of study. There were insufficient data for other student subgroups.

White	FRPL	Students with Disabilities
82.1%	56.4%	41.5%
		_

Table 4-5: School C rigorous course of study enrollment 2018-19.

## **Program of Studies Analysis**

School C's program of studies covers the 2020-21 school year. The document provides course summaries of all the classes offered at the school along with required prerequisites and corequisites. The program of studies also offers students additional resources for help with school and suggested tracks for students based on their college and career aspirations.

The program of studies revealed a more egalitarian tracking program than initially described by Principal C. In several subjects, the district has reduced the levels down to only two with no more than three levels in any one subject studied (see Figure 4.9). The math and science sequencing also provide several opportunities for students to move into advanced coursework with limited prerequisites (see Figure 4.10).

## Number of Levels by Subject and Grade

**English.** Both English 9 and English 10 had only three levels, which included a standard class and two forms of honors. Students could take honors or accelerated honors. In eleventh and twelfth grade, an Advanced Placement course was added to the offerings. Although Principal C reported a self-contained English course for students with special needs, no such course was reflected in the program of studies.

**Math.** Algebra I had only two levels: remedial and standard while the upper level math classes had three. Geometry had one standard level with two honors courses: honors and honors accelerated. Algebra was similarly organized with one standard level course, an honors course, and an honors accelerated course.

**Social Studies.** Social studies courses also had three levels. In ninth grade, students all take African-Asian Cultures at the career and college prep, honors, or accelerated honors level. In tenth grade, students can take Western Cultures at the career and college prep or honors level. Tenth grade students can also opt into Advanced Placement European History, which is also available to eleventh and twelfth graders. In eleventh grade, students must also take US History, which is taught at career and college prep, honors, and Advanced Placement levels.

Science. Biology and Chemistry has three levels much like the other core courses. Biology students could enroll at the college and career prep, honors, or accelerated honors levels. Chemistry students had the same options. Although Advanced Placement courses were offered for each subject, those were offered only after completion of the first course.



Figure 4-8: Levels by subject at School C.

# **Prerequisites and Corequisites**

**English.** All three English classes did not have prerequisites at any level. This seemed particularly notable for the Advanced Placement course offered to eleventh graders.

Math. Math courses only required completion of the course before in the math sequence. Thus, someone who had taken a standard Algebra I course could conceivably enroll in geometry honors without a gate. Algebra II only required either previous *or* concurrent enrollment in geometry.

Social Studies. All of the history courses were open enrollment with the exception of the two Advanced Placement courses. Both AP European History and AP US History required teacher recommendations.

Science. Biology had no prerequisites regardless of level. Chemistry, however, required students to complete biology and a certain level of Algebra I in order to enroll. To enroll in standard chemistry, students must have completed the standard Algebra 1 course. Honors chemistry requires standard Algebra 1 as well. Accelerated honors chemistry, however, requires students to complete honors geometry. Thus, a student's tracking in math could affect his or her track options in science.



Prerequisites by Subject

Figure 4-9: Prerequisites by course at School C.

# Types of Diplomas and Recommended Tracks

The district's program of studies only mentioned AP Capstone diplomas as an option for students outside of the regular requirements of the state. The state does not seem to support

multiple types of diplomas for students although recent regulations as a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) do allow for multiple testing pathways to a state diploma.

## **AP Program**

During the 2017-18 school year, 492 students (40.20%) enrolled in at least once Advanced Placement class. Asian students made up 12.8% of AP enrollees, Black students were 2.8%, Latinx students were 2.2%, multiracial students were 0.8%, and white students were 81.5%. Compared to the overall school population, white students were overrepresented, and all other student racial groups were underrepresented (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of schools' advanced enrollment by race). ELL students made up 0.2% of AP enrollees, and students with disabilities were 2.4% (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of schools' advanced enrollment by non-racial subgroups). These groups were also underrepresented compared to their overall school population.

When examining who stayed to take test in the spring, 260 students did so–52.84% of those enrolled in AP courses to begin with and 21.24% of the student body. Of the students taking AP exams, 15.5% were Asian, 1.5% were Black, 2.7% were Latinx, 0.9% were multiracial, and 79.3% were white. Compared to their enrollment at the school, Asian students were overrepresented. Black and Latinx students were underrepresented. White and multiracial students made up similar percentages. Exam taking data were not provided for ELLs.

*Representative Changes* According to OCR data collected for the 2015-16 school year, white students made up 84.7% of students enrolled in AP courses. Hispanic students were 2% of AP enrollees, and Black students made up 4.4% of AP enrollment. Asian students were 8.5% of AP enrollees. ELL students made up 0.4% of AP course takers while students with disabilities were 2%. Thus, there was an increase is the percentage of Black students while there was a

decrease in Asian students. Other racial subgroups stayed roughly the same proportion. The OCR data is not comparable in terms of test taking and test scores gathered in 2015-16 and 2017-18.

## **College Admission Test Taking**

In the 2017-18 school year, 406 students took the SAT or ACT (33.17% of the student body). Asian students were 9.4% of test takers, 3.7% were Black, 2.2% were Latinx, 0.2% were multiracial, and 84.5% were white. All students were underrepresented relative to the makeup of the entire student body except for white test takers, who were overrepresented.

*Representative Changes* According to the OCR data collected in 2015-16, 480 students from School C took the SAT and/or ACT in 2015-16 (see Table 4.6). Of those students 84.6% were white while 1.5% were Hispanic. Multiracial students made up 0.4% of college admissions test takers while Black students were 7.1%. Asian students were 6.5% of college admissions test takers. ELL students made up 0.8% of college admissions test takers while 6.5% were students with disabilities. While Asian and Latinx students experienced an increase in college admission test taking, Black students experienced a notable decrease. White students test taking rates were largely unchanged.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White
2015-16	6.5%	7.1%	1.5%	0.4%	84.6%
2017-18	9.4%	3.7%	2.2%	0.2%	84.5%

Table 4-6: College admissions test taking over time at School C.

## **Case Four: School D**

School D is a comprehensive public high school in New York state. It is part of a relatively small school district that has only one comprehensive public high. I interviewed Principal D, four assistant principals, and the chairs of the English, math, science, and social studies departments. I also used information gathered by the United States Department of

Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and data presented by the school's annual statemandated quality report to learn more about the school's context.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

School D had 1094 students enrolled during the 2018-19 school year. This enrollment was relatively stable compared to the 2015-16 OCR data. Student subgroup demographics were also relatively stable. For the demographics below, I will use the 2018-19 numbers, unless otherwise noted.

## General Racial Demographics

School D is a school made up predominately of white children. Of the students enrolled in the 2018-19 school year, 3.3% were Asian, and 7.3% were Black. Latinx students made up 10.4% of the student body, 1.7% were multiracial, and 77.2% were white (see Table 4.10 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics)..

### **Other Demographics**

Students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 14.1% of the student body, and 6.1% of students had 504-designated disabilities. Students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch make up 14.9% of the student body. English Language Learners were 1.2% of the student body (see Table 4.11 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

**ELL Students.** At School D, Latinx students made up 53.8% of ELL students. Asian students were 38.5%. White students made up 7.7% of the ELLs.

#### Graduation Rates

In 2019, 99.6% of students graduated (see Figure 4.11). Of Asian students, 100% graduated while 97.1% of Black students graduated. Among Hispanic students, 98.4% graduated while 99.5% of white students graduated. Students with disabilities graduated at a rate of 96.9%,



and 97.1% of economically oppressed students graduated. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

Figure 4-10: School D graduation rates over time.

## **Program of Studies Analysis**

School C's program of studies covers the 2020-21 school year. The document provides course summaries of all the classes offered at the school along with required prerequisites and corequisites. The program of studies also offers students additional resources for help with school and suggested tracks for students based on their college and career aspirations.

## Number of Levels by Subject and Grade

**English.** In ninth and tenth grade English, students have only one option: advanced English. According to the program of studies, there are support classes offered for students who may need them but all students are in advanced English. In eleventh grade, students may choose
between English 11 Regents or the first year of the International Baccalaureate English class. These classes, however, are co-seated and students learn together with only some differences in assessments, according to the program.

**Math.** Math sequencing often makes detracking difficult in this discipline. At School D, however, algebra I, geometry, and algebra II all have only one level. Students can double up on math and the higher levels have some leveling. The initial courses, which all students are required to take, are all unleveled.

**Science.** The introductory science classes are similar to the math classes. Biology has only one level. Chemistry has a supplemental honors lab that is taken with the chemistry course everyone takes. At the higher level of science, there is some leveling. Students do have options to double up on science, and there are also support classes.

**Social Studies**. The ninth and tenth grade social studies classes are a two-year sequence about global history and geography. There is only one level of each. In eleventh grade, students had the option of taking US History 11 or an IB History of the Americas class. The program of studies does not make it clear whether or not these courses are co-seated like the English 11





Figure 4-11: Levels by subject at School D.

## **Prerequisites and Corequisites**

**English.** English 9 has no prerequisite. English 10's only prerequisite is completing English 9. English 11 at both levels also only requires completing English 10.

**Math.** Prerequisites in math are minimal, too. There is no prerequisite for algebra I. Geometry requires completion of algebra I. Algebra II requires completion of geometry. As with other courses, students can be enrolled in support classes. More levels exist higher up in the math sequence.

**Science.** At School D, biology is known as the living environment. The course does not have a prerequisite. Chemistry's prerequisite is the completion of the living environment.

**Social Studies.** The ninth grade global history and geography class has no prerequisites. Tenth grade global history and geography's one prerequisite is to complete the ninth grade course. Both the standard nor the International Baccalaureate course in eleventh grade requires completion of tenth grade global history and geography.



Prerequisites by Subject

Figure 4-12: Prerequisites by subject at School D.

## Types of Diplomas and Recommended Tracks

There are two types of diplomas available at School D. Students can earn an International Baccalaureate diploma or a standard Regents diploma. All students are on track to complete the IB diploma at the end of the tenth grade, when they choose which diploma they will attempt. There have been some increases over time in enrollment in IB (see Table 4.7). **International Baccalaureate classes.** Of the entire student body in 2015-16, 25.71% were enrolled in IB courses. Of these students, 86.4% were white, 2.6% were multiracial, 5.9% were Hispanic, 2.6% were Black, and 2.6% were Asian.

There was a large increase in enrollment in 2017-18 with 42.41% of students enrolling in IB courses. Asian (4.3%), Black (4.5%), and Latinx (7.1%) students all saw increases in enrollment. White student enrollment proportion in IB decreased slightly (77.2%) and there was no statistical difference for multiracial students (1.7%). The 2015-16 data collection did not report IB demographics for ELLs, students with disabilities, or economically oppressed students. In 2017-18, 0.4% of IB enrollees were ELLs and 4.7% were students with disabilities.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
2015-16	2.6%	2.6%	5.9%	2.6%	86.4%	ND	ND
2017-18	4.3%	4.5%	7.1%	1.7%	77.2%	0.4%	4.7%

Table 4-7: International Baccalaureate enrollment over time at School D.

Advanced Placement classes. In 2015-16's OCR data collection, the school reported fewer students enrolled in AP classes with 16.92% of students taking at least one AP class. Of these students, 86% were white, 2.2% were multiracial, 5.6% were Hispanic, 2.2% were Black, and 3.9% were Asian.

In 2017-18, there was a slight increase in AP enrollment (18.65%). Of these enrollees, 3.8% were Asian, and 2.9% were Black. Latinx students made up 5.9% of AP course enrollees while multiracial students were 2.0%. White students made up 85.3% of AP enrollees. Enrollment proportions for subgroups measured both years were virtually unchanged (see Table 4.8).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White
				-	

2015-16	3.9%	2.2%	5.6%	2.2%	86%
2017-18	3.8%	2.9%	5.9%	2.0%	85.3%
<b>—</b> 11 / 0					1.5

Table 4-8: Advanced Placement enrollment over time at School D.

## **College Admission Test Taking**

According to the OCR data from 2015-16, 33.65% of students took college admissions tests. Of those students, 80.3% were white. Multiracial students made up 2% of college admissions test takers, and Hispanic students were 8.7%. Black students made up 5.3% of these test takers, and Asian students were 3.7%. Compared to the 2017-18 data, Asian, Latinx, and multiracial students all saw an increase in college admissions test taking. The proportion of Black students taking the SAT or ACT stayed the same and the proportion of white students decreased slightly (see Table 4.9).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White
2015-16	3.7%	5.3%	8.7%	2%	80.3%
2017-18	4.1%	4.8%	12.7%	2.8%	75.5%

Table 4-9: College admissions test taking over time at School D.

#### Summary

Each of the schools participating in the study had very different student bodies. Schools C and D were overwhelmingly white. School A had a clear majority of Latinx students while School B did not have a racial majority (see Table 4.10). Schools A and B had a large population of English Language Learners while these were smaller numbers at Schools C and D. There were also wide variations in students receiving free or reduced price lunch with School C, notably, having no students in this category. Interestingly, students with IDEA-designated disabilities made up similar proportions of the student bodies across all four schools (see Table 4.11).

	Asian	Black	Filipino	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific Islander	White
School A	3.4%	1.4%	1.5%	0.4%	59.1%	3.9%	2.1%	28.2%
School B	5.7%	28.6%	N/A	N/A	12.7%	6.6%	N/A	46.3%
School C	8.2%	5.6%	N/A	N/A	7.1%	0.9%	N/A	78.3%
School D	3.3%	7.3%	N/A	N/A	10.4%	1.7%	N/A	77.2%

Table 4-10: Racial demographics across schools for the 2018-19 school year.

	ELL	FRPL	504 Students	SWD
School A	19.5%	52.5%	N/A	15.8%
School B	11%	38%	N/A	14.2%
School C	2.2%	0%	8.6%	12.6%
School D	1.2%	14.9%	6.1%	14.1%

Table 4-11: Non-racial demographics across schools for the 2018-19 school year.

Although each of the schools in the study had undertaken some type of detracking, enrollments in advanced courses remained variable. White students were overrepresented relative to their student body populations at every school. Students from marginalized races varied their access to such courses (see Table 4.12). English Language Learners were also not granted much access although School A is notable for its larger portion compared to other schools. Students with disabilities enrollment in advanced courses was in the single digits at each school, as well (see Table 4.13).

	Asian	Black	Filipino	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific	White
							Islander	
School	5.3%	1.7%	NR	0%	51.5%	2.4%	1.4%	
A: IB								38.3%
School	4.8%	11.7%	N/A	N/A	7.4%	3.9%	N/A	72.3%
B: AP								
School	12.8%	2.8%	N/A	N/A	2.2%	0.8%	N/A	81.5%
C: AP								
School	12.8%	2.8%	N/A	N/A	2.2%	0.8%	N/A	81.5%
D :IB								

Table 4-12: Schools advanced enrollments by race, 2017-18.

	ELL	FRPL	504	SWD
			Students	
School	3.6%	NR	NR	3.5%
Α				
School	0.2%	NR	NR	1.1%
В				
School	0.2%	NR	NR	2.4%
С				
School	0.4%	NR	NR	4.7%
D				

Table 4-13: Schools advanced enrollments by non-racial subgroups, 2017-18.

As I will discuss in chapter five, these differences played a role in how the school leaders implemented detracking. These differences in implementations also gave rise to particular findings of how school leaders did and did not support students in detracking programs. In the next chapter, I will explore those findings and begin to discuss what they may mean for students and school leaders alike.

### **Chapter 5 FINDINGS**

This study was designed to investigate the composition, structures, functions, operations, and perceived effectiveness of detracking programs in high-performing high schools in the United States. Chapter 2 discussed the study's conceptual framework, which integrated the historical and structural perspectives on tracking and detracking decisions school leaders make using Sorensen's analysis of student sorting as a starting point. The foregrounding of culturally relevant school leadership along with cultural reproduction and critical race theories led to consulting (a) the literature on the challenges of integrating culturally relevant school leadership in various contexts and (b) the literature on the principal effects on student learning since these effects are the unit of analysis.

Chapter 2 revealed that few studies have examined the roles principals play in successful detracking programs or the causal mechanisms of student outcomes in these programs. Student sorting is a complex endeavor, and researchers cannot say with certainty what impact sorting students has on academic and social-emotional outcomes, making it difficult to answer clearly what research on school leaders' use of sorting systems tells us about supporting student learning and equitable outcomes–particularly for minoritized student populations. None of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 touched on the necessary and sufficient conditions for students to be organized without negatively impacting their futures. Furthermore, researchers overlooked discussions of school leaders' role in creating equitable access to rigorous curriculum with the exception of four articles (Bair & Bair, 2011; Biafora & Ansalone, 2008; Lewis & Cheng, 2006;Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) even though we know about their impact on student outcomes through their direct impact on teacher practices and the school culture (Seashore Louis, Dretzke,

et al., 2010). Thus, there exist gaps in the literature for considering principals' actions in detracking programs, particularly as a vehicle for increasing positive student outcomes.

Chapter 3 then outlined this study's proposed research design and methodology. This chapter included the study's mixed-methods design and rationale, a proposed method of site selection and choosing participants, potential data sources and access, proposed data collection and analysis procedures, and plans to protect the validity and trustworthiness of potential findings. This chapter continued with a statement addressing researcher biases and ethical concerns and concludes with a brief discussion of both the study's limitations and potential significance to the field of educational leadership.

Chapter 4 examined the contexts of the four different individual cases studied during the course of this project. That chapter demonstrated varying degrees of advancement in terms detracking by the respective school leaders. This chapter will now turn to looking at the findings of the study in the context of the research questions first presented in Chapter 1.

#### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

Given the aforementioned gaps in the literature, this study address the following research questions in order to examine school principals' actions within the context of high-performing detracking programs as measured by student outcomes:

1. How do school leaders foster detracking in their schools?

2a. What associations exist between school leaders' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs?

2b. How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracked programs?

- a. To what extent does variation exist among schools in terms of how school communities define and evaluate the perceived effectives of the detracking program?
- b. How might school leaders in different contexts replicate successful, equitable systems of organizing students?

## **Overview of the Research Findings**

## **Research Question 1**

Three out of four of the case study sites demonstrated near-universal access to pre-IB or pre-AP courses. Leaders supported teachers in differentiating and changing their mindsets about whom constitutes an honors student. Leaders also sought to help the surrounding community articulate and support values for detracking. In terms of student relationships, leaders also communicated high expectations for students.

## **Research Question 2a**

Because data collection first occurred during the 2019-20 school year and into the 2020-21 school year, I found it impossible to collect year-end or interim data that could be reliably used to establish what correlations might exist. I did, however, come to see some potential findings based on the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data along with the state report cards regarding each school. Organizing these findings by schools seemed to make the most sense in terms of analyzing these specific data because there were not individual student test scores. Another way to think about potential associations between principals' actions and student outcomes is to think about the Representation Index (RI) of students within advanced courses. An RI is the ratio of the proportion of students in a given category in advanced courses to the proportion of students from that given category in the school itself (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Below are several tables demonstrating the RIs for each school during the 2017-18 school year.

## **Research Question 2b**

By examining the first two research questions from a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources, I identified five supports school leaders gave that seemed like particularly important foundational steps in terms of student outcomes in detracking programs. School leaders demonstrated a commitment to the promises of equity and heterogeneity. Leaders also created and sustained a culture of honors work. Focusing on student support paid dividends for students, as did leveraging community resources. Finally, supporting teachers in navigating detracking work also supported successful student outcomes in these detracking programs.

## **Research Question 1 Findings**

To answer to the first research question, how do school leaders foster detracking in their schools, I looked specifically at leadership practices. Although interview participants provided diverse responses and quantitative analysis suggested some complication of those responses, some themes emerged when merging the results of the datasets (see Table 5.1). Three out of four of the case study sites demonstrated near-universal access to pre-IB or pre-AP courses. Leaders supported teachers in differentiating and changing their mindsets about whom constitutes an honors student. Leaders also sought to help the surrounding community articulate and support values for detracking. In terms of student relationships, leaders also communicated high expectations for students.

Leadership Action Dimensions	Specific Actions
Honors-for-all	Co-seating Minimizing pro requisites
	Including special education students

	Working with and against district policies
Supporting Teachers	Curriculum development
	Fostering teacher beliefs
	Hiring and tenure practices
	Providing resources and professional development
Community Outreach	Center community values
	Clear communication
	Community partnerships
Student Relationships	Explicit supports
	High expectations
	High expectations

Table 5-1: Leadership Actions Fostering Detracking

# Honors-for-all *Co-seating*

All of the schools practice some form of co-seating in which some students are enrolled in an honors course and others are not. The idea behind these co-seated courses is that all students have access to honors-level instruction. Schools B and D also have an honors-for-all program for nearly all ninth and tenth graders that prepares them for AP or IB work respectively.

In the last few years, parents of both higher- and lower-achieving students at School D have pushed for more differentiation in the school's detracking program. Two years ago, the school implemented a co-seated model that allowed students taking the IB exam and students taking the Regents exam to be in the same class together without creating a separate section and thus track. Although students must decide to take the IB exam by the end of tenth grade, English Chair D felt this arrangement was quite equitable. "The nice thing is there's no one who is necessarily labeled in a way that makes it obvious that they somehow shouldn't be in the room," he said. "It's well understood that that decision to be a Regents kid in an IB class is made by the student ostensibly."

## Minimizing Prerequisites

Decreasing prerequisites can help students change their minds about attempting higherlevel work. In his interview, Principal C suggested not much had been done in the way of detracking at his school, but School C has notably fewer tracks than other schools in this study. This school also had notably fewer prerequisites for courses than other schools in this study. Principal A also noted minimizing prerequisites while many participants at School D categorized prerequisites as "suggestions." These findings invite a discussion about district- versus schoollevel leadership on tracking and detracking.

#### **Special Education**

Students with special education needs are not, as one might assume, excluded from detracking. Both School B and School D are notable for including many students with disabilities in many of their honors-for-all classes. Like her fellow department chairs in social studies and science, Math Chair B praised the special educators who worked with general education teachers to make sure that students with IEPs also had access to the honors-for-all curriculum:

We were very fortunate to have a really strong collab teacher, I think, who really tried to provide in our PLCs a real voice for those kids, and scaffolding," the chair said. "Again, do we need to work on it? Yes. Absolutely. Is it something that I feel like we could take out and still call it unleveled? No." She was quick, however, to criticize the English department, which has failed to include students with special needs in their honors-for-all classes. "So, you got biology, and world geography that all had those collab classes doing these unleveled classes," she said. "And government. They had collab...None of them pulled it out like English did.

School B AP1 oversees the special education department and is a former special education teacher. As such, she portrayed particular passion about students with disabilities having been included in the detracking program. Students "might have a disability in reading or writing that might impact their ability to access some of the content from a traditional standpoint," she noted, but it doesn't mean they can't understand the concepts or we can't scaffold things to make it accessible for them."

According to DAP3, collaborative special education teachers work in higher level classes, including higher level math courses. This corresponds with what another AP at this school shared. "The special education kids are in these [advanced] classrooms, he said. "By the way, they're very successful." Similar to other administrators at this school,DAP3 noted that there has been a tension between supporting students with special needs in appropriate settings and maintaining high expectations. To that end, there is now a small Regents-only track for students who need more than the life skills training but cannot do the work of the IB-for-all program.

## Working With and Against District Policies

School leaders across the study discussed how district policies often create roadblocks to their detracking aims. Most have come up with creative ways to work within the policy–or ignore it altogether. Principal A has created multiple workarounds for district policies that could undermine detracking. For example, he uses the required district placement test but then he co-seats pre-IB and "regular classes." He also sets few prerequisites that can keep students out of upper-level courses, keeping only the minimums required by the district.

Because most tracking begins when students are younger, collaborating with feeder middle schools in their respective district has been key to making detracking work throughout the sites. Math Chair D explained that all students take the same math courses in grades six through ten with algebra I in eighth grade, geometry in ninth grade, and algebra II in tenth grade. After that, students can choose a few different directions between IB and AP math courses. The school does offer remedial courses for students who do not pass the appropriate Regents for their year. In starting detracking, this particular district decided to offer algebra I in eighth grade and then planned the sixth and seventh grade math curriculum to prepare students for that course.

To solve the problem of middle school teachers recommending too many students for lower-level course at School C, the high school undertook vertical alignment in all of the core courses to outline where students need to be for each course. "I think it was well-received, and I was very pleased to see that the number of course recommendations for this past year for English 9, Accelerated Honors, was over 100," Principal C said. "We're where we need to be."

In discussing communication, administrators, and leadership styles, Social Studies Chair D also pointed out the important roles that district leaders have and continue to play in the detracking program. "We're not just talking about a building principal making these decisions," she said. "It's also your directors of special education, it's your assistant superintendent for curriculum instruction, it's your superintendent." She also noted that district leaders were intimately involved in the change to a co-seated IB/standard history class discussed above despite teacher concerns. "I think teachers find it really problematic," she said. "But I think it was a way for the district to come and thread the needle and still keep IB for all and calm community concerns."

#### **Supporting Teachers**

## Curriculum Development

Teachers take a lot of responsibility for writing curriculum in these detracked schools, something to which school leaders attributed their successes. According to English Chair D, the faculty largely write their own curriculum and assessment models to suit the students in their courses interest and abilities. This practice provides for plenty of opportunity for differentiation and is a key piece of making detracking work at School D.

We are charged with creating assessment models that will allow for differentiation. That is helpful in that we can make decisions as to how we're going to create accommodation for students who are seated alongside the IB students, but who are not necessarily in the program and ought to have modified assessment models, and assignments, and expectations.

At School D, teachers are responsible for writing their own curriculum in subject-level teams. According to Principal D, this practice has helped to make the pre-IB-for-all program more coherent and accessible. Principal D also noted that this practice has also helped to make the co-seated IB and Regents courses more rigorous for all students while providing appropriate supports.

What detracking is, is taking a look at the tracks that you do have, looking at the areas of strength and weakness in each, and consolidating towards a cohesive curriculum that still addresses the needs of all students, but also affords them the opportunity to learn in a more inclusive environment rather than a series of echo chambers.

#### Fostering Teacher Beliefs

School leaders spoke at length about the ways in which they have helped teachers overcome stereotypes about students who "belong" in higher-level classes. Principal B is pushing teachers to think about who is an "honors student" and how to deliver curriculum to all students in culturally responsive ways. Principal C is taking an incredibly slow approach at his school. He is working to foster teacher beliefs in student success along with student beliefs in themselves. Most notably, he is working with middle school teachers to re-consider their assumptions about students' possible future courses.

Culturally responsive instructional leadership seems to play a big role in detracking at across schools. Math Chair B noted that she has attempted to cultivate a growth mindset within her department for both students and teachers.

We tried to do a lot of group stuff this year with maybe people they weren't normally with, and kind of giving kids different roles and stuff like that, and trying to maybe not necessarily ... It wasn't as math-y, let's say. Geometry kind of gives us a little more flexibility with that. And just showing them little things that they could be successful with I think was good.

**Hiring and Tenure Practices.** How teachers are recruited, hired, and evaluated for tenure is an important part of fostering teacher beliefs at all four of the studied schools. Principal noted the importance of hiring teachers who will be willing to change and implement new ideas.

I really think it is important to have, if you want to do this work, teachers on your staff who are really smart but also really humble and flexible and understand that the way they do things now probably won't be the way they are going to be doing things in five, 10, 15, 20 years.

As part of the hiring process at School D, for example, teacher candidates are introduced to the detracking philosophy and expected to discuss how they will adhere to that philosophy should they come to work at the school. These expectations extend to teachers earning tenue as well. "If you don't believe in that philosophy, go someplace else. And that's how it is. You do not get tenure easily at [School D]. They look for a lot of things coming out of a person in order to get tenure."

DAP3 noted many differences between his previous school in a neighboring district and School D, in particular how teachers reacted to detracking. In recruiting teachers, the administrative team works to make their detracking philosophy clear: "If you don't buy into detracking, it's not for you. You will not be happy, you will be an unhappy educator, and nobody wants their teacher to be unhappy going into a classroom." He noted that these hiring practices mainly relate to interview questions about differentiation and challenging students.

**Providing Resources and Professional Development.** School leaders provided myriad examples of the ways in which providing necessary resources and professional development targeted at the skills necessary to teach academically heterogenous classes. Principal A has recognized that teachers are key to doing and sustaining detracking work. He aims to support them in professional development and materials, particularly through a strong IB framework. Principal A also focuses on offering teachers resources in the form of professional development and materials to make differentiation easier. According to Assistant Principal B1, teachers at her school also have time and remuneration for dedicated summer work on differentiation.

Science Chair B cited the most helpful leadership support has been making resources available to biology teachers. This support felt particularly easy to access because the school's principal is also the science department's supervising administrator. The chair also noted that the biology team takes priority in the department as they navigate the challenges of detracking. "Anything they want and they ask for that's not beyond reason, they'll get, she said. "So they are definitely priority in the department, which is fine. They should be."

## **Community Outreach**

## **Centering Community Values**

Helping the larger school community articulate the values by which they hope to live has supported detracking efforts, according to these school leaders. By outlining and constantly revisiting the community's values that lead to detracking both within and outside of the school itself, Principal A has continued to sustain the community's support for detracking. AP B1 also described an administrative team that is completely bought in to the idea of detracking and the detracking program at School B in particular. She noted that this unity makes it easier both to support teachers and to respond to parents' concerns. This unity seems to come directly from the school principal, she said, who "just really sent the message that this is what we're doing and it's what's best for all students, not just your student."

## **Clear Communication**

Across schools, clear communication among educators and families seemed to be key in terms of keeping detracking happening smoothly. Science Chair B also emphasized the importance of a unified leadership team in leading detracking changes both for teachers and for students' families. The leadership team is made up of the principal, the assistant principals, the department chairs, and the two instructional coaches. "We had meetings where it was mostly leadership team and instructional coaches," she said. "And those meetings were just what I was talking about, is trying to get us all on the same script."

This scripting was important when talking both to other teachers and to parents. Science Chair B also noted that the excitement the principal shared in leadership team meetings was infectious. "He was just really excited about the benefits and just the kids and getting them to another level that normally they wouldn't be able to go to," she said.

## **Community Partnerships**

Community partners played an important role for all of the schools in their detracking work. According to Principal D, language barriers for ELL students and economic hardship for economically oppressed students are two of the most significant barriers to student success in the detracking program. Two particular community groups have helped support these students outside of school and improved access to higher-level work in the detracking program. "So the community is hugely supportive of our special needs or at-risk kids," Principal D said. "We also partner with other agencies, the Martin Luther King Jr Center and the Latinx Brotherhood who provides afterschool and during school support for those students. We also reach out through our special education programs to look for those special supports that are necessary and where the district has to supplement those where necessary."

In addition to his role as an assistant principal at School B, BAP2 serves as the director or student activities and athletics. Through this role, he exhibited a passion for making sure that students have access to equal opportunities both within the classroom and the wider school community. In this role, he has seen the larger community work together to provide students with additional support. "I think one thing we do well in the city is I do feel like we are at least cognizant of [inequality] and make an effort," he said. "There are folks, whether attached to the school or not, I even get contacted by a lot of folks out in the community that want to make sure that those things aren't barriers to access, academically or athletically."

#### **Student Relationships**

## **Explicit** Supports

Students often require additional supports in detracking programs, including socialemotional supports. Because of her position as a supervisor of the counseling department, CSD noted several important roles that department plays. She shared in particular the consultations counselors provide for teachers who are concerned about students. Counselors also work with students to help them manage their time in an often academically challenging program. The counseling team has also worked to help students connect with community mental health resources during the COVID-19 crisis. "Our social workers have been very much in touch with students, as soon as they hear that there might be an issue of some kind," she said.

Students were at the heart of my conversation with DAP2, and they are at the heart of planning for the detracking program at School D. One of DAP2's colleagues who oversees the special education program makes schedules for students with IEPs by hand to ensure that they are getting access to high-level courses with appropriate support. During the summer, all the assistant principals work together to "balance" the schedules to make sure that each class represents a mix of students in terms of backgrounds and interests in a particular subject. DAP2 sees "the goal of the district is to provide a great educational experience for all students, not just a singular group or a singular set of students."

DAP3 highlighted several support systems in place for struggling students at School D. DAP3 saw social-emotional support as of equal importance to academic support in terms of helping students in the detracking program. According to DAP3, Principal D in particular rises to this challenge.

You have kids that come into the social workers and psychologists with anxiety, depression, other issues. Then their related support staff, counselors, social workers, psychologists can go to the principal and say, 'Look, this kid's having a breakdown in Physics, and it's really hard for this kid and we need to do something.' Well, my point is, if you see where I'm going, is that he constantly gets hit at all angles because we have heterogeneity in our classrooms. He has to be able to absorb that and then deal with it effectively and appropriately. That is not easy to do, not easy. And he has to kind of continue to motivate, right? And help each individual involved.

At School C, students may be moved up to higher level classes than they initially selected. According to Principal C, he and his staff make sure to provide those students with additional monitoring to make sure they are successful, particularly at the beginning of the year. "They were on our radar to make sure that they were going to be successful," he said. "Just keep an eye on them in the first month or two of school to make sure that they were successful."

#### High Expectations

Maintaining high expectations for all students can be a shift in thinking for some teachers. Building-level administrators who oversee various department has been instrumental in helping teachers adjust to this shift, according to multiple teachers. Social Studies Chair B, for example, noted that Principal B clearly communicates high expectations to students. He uses the weekly advisory period to disseminate videos to students. "He'll do a school-wide video about key things and we share that in our [advisor]y classes, that I think sets a positive tone for students, for everybody," the chair said.

In a similar vein, BAP2 noted a dogged determination amongst administrators to support students in the detracking program. The ethos of the program, according to BAP2 is "making sure that all students have access to the same resources and the same information as students who traditionally would have been considered to be in a more college preparatory or an advanced track," he said. This ethos was on display during the initial closures related to COVD-19, according to BAP2.

In addition to doing the work on the screen in front of us, we're figuring out who needed what, and so I think that that is just the culture of our building and our administrators. And we're not just because you have a principal or an assistant principal next to your name or a doctorate, it doesn't mean you don't go jump in the car and go knock on a student's door.

This belief that high expectations with strong supports are necessary for all students was also on display at School D. School leaders reiterated again and again that all students have a right to access advanced curriculum. "I believe all kids, first of all, I do believe that all kids can succeed provided they're given the access and the support they may need," DAP1 said and echoed many of his colleagues in doing so.

#### **Research Question 2a Findings**

The answer to the second research question, what associations exist between school leaders' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs, intended to determine if there may be a statistical correlation between specific school leader actions and student outcomes in the cases I studied. Because data collection first occurred during the 2019-20 school year and into the 2020-21 school year, I found it impossible to collect year-end or interim data that could be reliably used to establish what correlations might exist. I did, however, come to see some potential findings based on the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data along with the state report cards regarding each school. Organizing these findings by schools seemed to make the most sense in terms of analyzing these specific data because there were not individual student test scores. Another way to think about potential associations between principals' actions and student outcomes is to think about the Representation Index (RI) of students within advanced courses. An RI is the ratio of the proportion of students in a given category in advanced courses to the proportion of students from that given category in the school itself (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Below are several tables demonstrating the RIs for each school during the 2017-18 school year.

## School A

Although Principal A's interview revealed a strong desire to detrack the IB program at the school, initial data analysis suggests that School A is not as detracked as they would like to be. White and Asian students continue to be overrepresented in college preparatory tests, state test passes, and the IB program. The 2017-18 OCR data showed an increase in the proportion of marginalized students taking IB courses at the school. Principal A seems particularly supportive of students learning English and Latinx students. Students with disabilities and Indigenous students remain groups of concern who may be overlooked.

School A had 2067 student enrolled during the 2018-19 school year according to the state school accountability report card. This enrollment seems relatively stable when compared to the 2015-16 OCR data. The student demographics within that enrollment also seemed relatively stable.

## General Racial Demographics

During the 2018-19 school year, Latinx students made up 59.1% of the student body at School A. White students made up 28.2% while multiracial students made up 3.9% of students. Asian students were 3.4% of the student body, but the school report card did not distinguish between students from East Asia or South Asia. Students from Hawaii or the Pacific islands were 2.1% of the student body. There were 1.5% Filipino students and 1.4% of students were Black. Indigenous students made up 0.4% of the student body (see Table 5.26 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics).

**Other demographics.** A majority of students experience economic oppression with 52.5% of the student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch. English language learners made

up 19.5% of students and 15.8% of students had a documented disability. Children in foster care made up 0.2% of the student body, and 0.7% of students experienced homelessness during the 2018-19 school year (see Table 5.27 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

## **IB** Program

During the 2017-18 school year, 666 of the 2142 students were enrolled in the IB program. White students made up 38.3% of the IB program while multiracial students were 2.4%. Pacific Islanders made up 1.4% of the program, and Latinx students made up 51.5% of the program. Black students made up 1.7% of the program and Asian students were 5.3% of the IB enrollment. No Indigenous students were enrolled in the program. Relative to their populations in the school as a whole, white and Asian students were overrepresented and multiracial students were underrepresented. Pacific Islanders and Black students were represented at about the same rate (see Table 5.2).

ELL students made up 3.6% of IB enrollees. Students with disabilities were 3.5% of the IB-enrolled population. Both of these groups were underrepresented compared to their overall population in the school. This version of the OCR data did not include students receiving free and reduced lunch in their IB enrollment data collection.

While underrepresentation continues to be a problem in the IB program, there are signs of improvement. A larger percentage of students were enrolled in the program in 2017-18. Asian, white, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and Black students all increased as a proportion of the program. Indigenous students, however, did not enroll at all when in 2015-16, they made up 0.38% of the program.

	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific Islanders	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD (IDEA)
IB	0.053	0.017	0	0.515	.039	0.014	0.383	0.036	N/A	0.035

School										
Pop.	0.038	0.013	0.04	0.615	0.031	0.017	0.282	0.183	0.493	0.121
RCI	1.394736842	1.307692308	0	0.837398374	1.258064516	0.8235294118	1.358156028	0.1967213115	N/A	0.2892561983

*Table 5-2: School A IB RI, 2017-18.* 

## College Admissions Test Taking

During the 2017-18 school year, 606 students at School A took the SAT or ACT or 28.29% of the school. Of those students, 40.8% were white while 1.8% were multiracial. Pacific Islanders mad up 1.2% of college admissions test takers, and 47.9% were Latinx. Black students made up 2% of test takers, and 6.4% were Asian. No Indigenous students took college admissions test. Students learning English made up 6.8% test takers, and students with IDEA-defined disabilities 3.6%. OCR did not offer data for students with 504s or those receiving free and reduced lunch.

The proportion of students taking a college admissions test increased from 20.70% in 2015-16 to 28.29% in 2017-18. Latinx, Black, and Asian students all had increases in their proportions of test takers. Pacific Islanders, white, and multiracial students all saw their proportions decrease. ELL students increased their proportion of test takers while the proportion of students with disabilities taking college admissions tests decreased (see Table 5.3).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific	White	ELLs	SWD
					Islander			
2015-	5.81%	.93%	42.7%	7.2%	1.16%	42.09%	1.62%	5.2%
16								
2017-	6.4%	2%	47.9%	1.8%	1.2%	40.8%	6.8%	3.6%
18								

Table 5-3: College admission test taking over time at School A

## State Test Scores

According to the 2018-19 school accountability report card, 60% of students met or exceeded state testing requirements in English Language Arts. (see Table 5.4) Subgroup data show wide disparities. Asian students passed at a rate of 71.43%. Latinx students passed at a rate

of 44.88%. Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders passed at a rate of 27.27%. White students passed at a rate of 87.5%. Multiracial students passed at a rate of 68.42%. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 42.13%. ELL students passed at a rate of 16.83%, and students with disabilities passed at a rate of 17.65%. Other groups of students were not tested in large enough numbers to report out their testing rates.

	Asian	HI/PI	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
2018- 19	71.43%	27.27%	44.8%	68.42%	87.5%	16.83%	42.13%	17.65%

Table 5-4: School A ELA state test pass rates, 2018-19.

In mathematics, 45% of students met or exceeded state testing requirements. In math, subgroups also demonstrated wide disparities (see Table 5.5). Asian students passed at a rate of 53.33%. Latinx students passed at a rate of 25.94%. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders passed at a rate of 16.67%. White students passed at a rate of 80.47%. Multiracial students passed at a rate of 65%. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 7.27%. Other groups of students were not tested in large enough numbers to report out their testing rates.

	Asian	HI/PI	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
2018- 19	55.33%	16.67%	25.94%	65%	80.47%	8.26%	23.68%	7.27%

Table 5-5: School A math state test pass rates, 2018-19.

## **Graduation Rates**

According to the school accountability report card, School A has experienced a slight decrease in graduation rates in the past three years. In 2015-16, 91% of students graduated. In 2018-19, 86.6% of students graduated. Neither the school report nor the OCR data broke graduation data down by subgroup (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5-1: Graduation rates over time at School A.

*UC requirements*. In California, the university system has a college preparatory program required of students wishing to enter a University of California (UC) school. The school accountability report card tracks students taking these courses. In the 2018-19 school year, 98.31% of students were enrolled in at least one of the classes necessary to meet the UC requirements. In the previous year, 62.36% of students met all of those requirements. The report card does not offer subgroup information.

## School B

Although Principal B's interview also revealed a strong desire to detrack the school, initial data analysis suggests that School B still has room to grow in terms of supporting marginalized students in advanced coursework and graduation. White students continue to be overrepresented in state pass rates, AP course taking and qualification, graduation rates, and advanced diploma earnings. Based on the 2017-18 OCR data, while there has been a slight decrease in students enrolling in AP courses, there have been increases among minoritized student groups.

The most recent year for which data is available is from the year prior to all ninth grade courses becoming honors-for-all in 2019-2020. Several courses were honors-for-all in 2018-19, however, and seem to have paid some dividends in terms of student test scores. Student enrollment in AP courses along with AP test taking and qualifying still lag, however.

School B had 1230 students enrolled during the 2018-19 school year. This enrollment was an increase of about 100 students from the 2015-16 OCR data. The student demographics also experienced a slight shift. From 2015-16 to 2018-19 there was an increase in the percentage of Latinx, multiracial, and white students. In the same time period, there was a decrease in the percentage Asian and Black students.

#### **General Racial Demographics**

School B does not have any one group of students who make up the majority racial category (see Table 5.26 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics). White students were the largest group at 46.3% of the student body. Asian students were 5.7% of students while Black students made up 28.6% of the student body. Latinx or Latinx students were 12.7% of the student body and multiracial students were 6.6% of the student body. There were too few American Indian or Pacific Islander students to report.

**Other demographics.** The state quality report included socioeconomic demographics, language learning status, and students with disabilities (see Table 5.27 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non- racial demographics). The report did not break these categories down further with other demographics. At School B, 38% of students experience economic oppression and are registered for free and reduced price lunch. English Language Learners (ELL) made up 11% of the student body. Students with disabilities were 14.2% of the student body.

#### Advanced Placement Classes

During the 2017-18 school year, 462 of the 1114 (41.47%) students were enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement class. Of those students, 4.8% were Asian and 11.7% were Black. Latinx students made up 7.4% of AP students while 3.9% were multiracial students. White students made up 72.3% of AP students. ELL students were just 0.2% of AP enrollees while students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 1.1%. Only white students were overrepresented in terms of AP enrollment. All other categories were underrepresented relative to their proportion of the student body.

Looking at who stayed to take the AP exam in the spring, 5.5% were Asian and 7.1% were Black. Latinx students made up 5.5% of AP exam takers while 3.9% were multiracial. White students made up 78% of AP exam takers. Again, white students were overrepresented while all other student groups were underrepresented (see Table 5.6)

Compared to the 2015-16 OCR data, fewer students took AP courses in 2017-18 (45.9% to 41.47%). Most student groups experienced non-significant changes. Latinx students, however, went from making up 5% of AP enrollees to 7.4%. Multiracial students went from 2.9% to 3.9%. White students went from 75.6% to 72.3%. In terms of test taking, Black students went from 9.6% of test takers to 7.1% while Asian students went from 4.5% to 5.5%. Other subgroups stayed roughly the same.

	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific Islanders	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD (IDEA)
АР	0.048	0.117	0	0.074	0.039	0	0.723	0.002	N/A	0.011
School Population	0.068	0.38	0	0.114	0.049	0.01	0.461	0.119	0.481	0.125
RCI	0.7058823529	0.3078947368	N/A	0.649122807	0.7959183673	0	1.568329718	0.01680672269	N/A	0.088

Table 5-6: School B AP RIs, 2017-18.

# College Admissions Test Taking

In 2015-16, white students made up 59.1% of SAT and ACT test takers. Multiracial students comprised 4.3% of this group while Latinx students made up 3.3%. Of the college admissions test takers, 27.2% were Black and 5.3% were Asian. Enough Indigenous students did these tests to report out, and they made up 0.7% of the group.

In 2017-18, 25.49% took the SAT or ACT. Of these students, 3.9% were Asian, while 28.9% were Black. Latinx students made up 7% of college admission test takers while 3.9% were multiracial. White students made up 56.3% of these test takers. ELL students were 2.5% of test takers while 3.2% had IDEA-designated disabilities. Once again, white students were overrepresented while all other student groups were underrepresented (see Table 5.7).

	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
2015-	5.3%	27.2%	0.7%	3.3%	4.3%	59.1%	ND	ND
16								
2017-	3.9%	28.9%	ND	7%	3.9%	56.3%	2.5%	3.2%
18								

Table 5-7: College admission test taking over time at School B.

## Graduation

According to the state quality profile, School B has enjoyed an increase in on-time graduation rates over time. The graduation rate of 89.6% in 2016-17 increased to 95.7% in 2018-19. In the 2018-19 school year, Black students graduated on time at a rate of 95.9% while 90.9% of Latinx students graduated on time. White students had an on-time graduation rate of 97.5% while 94.1% of Asian students graduated on time. Multiracial students graduated on-time at a rate of 92.9%. Students with disabilities graduated on time at a rate of 95.3% while 94.2% of economically oppressed students graduated on time. Only 81.5% of ELLs graduated on time (see Figure 5.2)



Student Demographics



**Diploma Types.** The commonwealth of Virginia offers two types of diplomas: standard and advanced. To gain an advanced diploma, students must take advanced courses along with several years of a foreign language. At School B, 49.8% of the class of 2019 graduated with advanced diplomas while 45.9% graduated with standard diplomas (see Table 5.8). The

remaining students either took a GED or some other certificate (2.5%) or dropped out (1.9%). Only 25.5% of Black students graduated with an advanced diplomas while 39.4% of Latinx students did so. The numbers were nearly reversed for white students of whom 72.9% graduated with advanced diplomas. Within the Asian student population, 41.2% graduated with advanced diplomas while 57.1% of multiracial students did so. Of students with disabilities, 14% graduated with advanced diplomas while 23.3% of economically oppressed students did so. Within the ELL student population, 14.8% graduated with advanced diplomas.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL
Advanced	41.2%	25.5%	39.4%	57.1%	72.9%	14.8%	23.3%
Standard	58.8%	74.5%	60.6%	42.9%	27.1%	85.2%	76.7%

Table 5-8: Class of 2019 diploma types at School B.

## State Standardized Tests

State tests separated into subgroups was also available for School B. In 2018-19, 94% of the students at School B passed the state reading test (see Table 5.9). Black students passed at a rate of 86% while Latinx students passed at a rate of 95%. White students passed at a rate of 98%, and 100% of students from multiracial backgrounds passed. Not enough Asian students took the test to report their pass rate as a group. Students will disabilities passed at a rate of 90%, and 84% of economically oppressed students passed. Of the ELLs who took the test, 100% passed.

Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD		
ND	86%	95%	100%	98%	100%	84%	90%		

Table 5-9: Student state reading test pass rates at School B, 2018-19.

With the state writing test, 91% of students overall passed (see Table 5.10). Black students passed at a rate of 80% while Latinx students passed at a rate of 84%. White students passed at a rate of 99% while Asian students passed at a rate of 89%. Multiracial students passed

at a rate of 82%. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 82% while 81% of economically oppressed students passed. Not enough ELLs took the test to report their pass rates.

Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD		
89%	80%	84%	82%	99%	ND	81%	82%		
Table 5 10: Student state writing test page rates at School P 2018 10									

*Table 5-10: Student state writing test pass rates at School B, 2018-19.* 

Among the mathematics test, I was most interested in the geometry pass rates since that is where the school is working on creating an honors-for-all curriculum. In 2018-19, 81% of students passed the geometry state test (see Table 5.11). Only 64% of Black students passed, however. Latinx students passed at a rate of 80% while white students passed at a rate of 96%. Asian students passed at a rate of 89%, and multiracial students passed at a rate of 86%. Only 52% of students with disabilities passed the state geometry test while 75% of economically oppressed students passed. Of the ELLs who took the test, 63% passed.

Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
89%	64%	80%	86%	96%	63%	75%	52%
	~ .			~			

Table 5-11: Student state geometry test pass rates at School B, 2018-19.

Within the battery of science tests offered by the state, I was most interested in biology because of their honors-for-all status. In 2018-19, 87% of students passed (see Table 5.12). Black students passed at a rate of 70% while 93% of Latinx students passed. White students passed at a rate of 95% while 91% of Asian students passed. Of students from multiracial backgrounds, 92% passed. Students will disabilities passed at a rate of 72% while 76% of economically oppressed students passed. Of the ELLs who took the state biology test, 67% passed.

Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
91%	70%	93%	92%	95%	67%	76%	72%

Table 5-12: Student state biology pass rates at School B, 2018-19.

There is also a state test in geography, another honors-for-all course. In 2018-19, all students who took the test passed it across all demographic levels. No ELL students took this test, however.

## School C

This school has not experienced significant detracking other than getting rid of the lowest level of courses and rebranding the new lowest level as "college and career prep." A large majority of students, however, are enrolling in some type of rigorous course per the state information. Based on the 2017-18 OCR data, School C experienced a slight decrease in minoritized students taking the SAT or ACT and a slight increase in minoritized students taking and qualification, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment. Analysis of the updated OCR data demonstrated that white students continue to be overrepresented in AP enrollment and test taking.

## General Demographics

According to the PA Future Ready Index, there were 1296 students enrolled at School C in the 2018-19 school year. At School C, white students are 78.4% of the student body. Latinx students make up 8.2% of the student body while Asian students are 7.8%. Black students are 4.9% of the student body, and multiracial students are 0.8%. Per the OCR data, the overall enrollment has been stable over time but the percentages of Black and Asian students have essentially flipped (see Table 5.26 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's racial demographics).

**Other demographics.** During the 2018-19 school year, 16.1% of students were economically oppressed. Students with disabilities made up 12.9% of the student body while

2.7% of students were English Language Learners. Pennsylvania also collects data on students in foster care, homelessness, and military connections. At School C, 0.1% of students are in foster care while 1.1% are unhoused, and 1% are connected to the military (see Table 5.27 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

#### Advanced Placement Classes

According to OCR data collected for the 2015-16 school year, white students made up 84.7% of students enrolled in AP courses. Latinx students were 2% of AP enrollees, and Black students made up 4.4% of AP enrollment. Asian students were 8.5% of AP enrollees. ELL students made up 0.4% of AP course takers while students with disabilities were 2%. Thus, there was an increase is the percentage of Black students while there was a decrease in Asian students. Other racial subgroups stayed roughly the same proportion.

During the 2017-18 school year, 492 students (40.20%) enrolled in at least once Advanced Placement class. Asian students made up 12.8% of AP enrollees, Black students were 2.8%, Latinx students were 2.2%, multiracial students were 0.8%, and white students were 81.5%. Compared to the overall school population, white students were overrepresented, and all other student racial groups were underrepresented. ELL students made up 0.2% of AP enrollees, and students with disabilities were 2.4%. These groups were also underrepresented compared to their overall school population (see Table 5.13).

	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific Islanders	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD (IDEA)	
AP	0.128	0.028	0	0.022	0.008	0	0.815	0.002	0	0.024	
School Population	0.082	0.056	0	0.071	0.009	0	0.783	0.022	0	0.126	
RI	1.56097561	0.5	N/A	0.3098591549	0.8888888889	N/A	1.040868455	0.09090909091	N/A	0.1904761905	
Table 5	Fable 5.12, School CAD Pla 2017.18										

*Table 5-13: School C AP RIs, 2017-18.*
When examining who stayed to take test in the spring, 260 students did so–52.84% of those enrolled in AP courses to begin with and 21.24% of the student body. Of the students taking AP exams, 15.5% were Asian, 1.5% were Black, 2.7% were Latinx, 0.9% were multiracial, and 79.3% were white. Compared to their enrollment at the school, Asian students were overrepresented. Black and Latinx students were underrepresented. White and multiracial students made up similar percentages. Exam taking data were not provided for ELLs. The OCR data is not comparable in terms of test taking and test scores gathered in 2015-16 and 2017-18.

## College Admissions Test Taking

According to the OCR data collected in 2015-16, 480 students from School C took the SAT and/or ACT in 2015-16. Of those students 84.6% were white while 1.5% were Latinx. Multiracial students made up 0.4% of college admissions test takers while Black students were 7.1%. Asian students were 6.5% of college admissions test takers. ELL students made up 0.8% of college admissions test takers while 6.5% were students with disabilities.

In the 2017-18 school year, 406 students took the SAT or ACT (33.17% of the student body). Asian students were 9.4% of test takers, 3.7% were Black, 2.2% were Latinx, 0.2% were multiracial, and 84.5% were white. All students were underrepresented relative to the makeup of the entire student body except for white test takers, who were overrepresented. While Asian and Latinx students experienced an increase in college admission test taking, Black students experienced a notable decrease. White students test taking rates were largely unchanged (see Table 5.14).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
2015-16	6.5%	7.1%	1.5%	0.4%	84.6%	0.8%	6.5%
2017-18	9.4%	3.7%	2.2%	0.2%	84.5%	ND	ND

*Table 5-14: College admissions test taking over time at School C.* 

#### Graduation Rates

The four-year cohort graduation rate for School C in 2017-18 was 95.9%. Of Asian students, 100% graduated while 95.8% of Latinx students did. Of white students, 97.3% graduated. Economically oppressed students graduated at a rate of 78% while 75.7% of students with disabilities graduated. In the 2018-19 school year, the overall graduation rate went up to 97.4%. Of white students, 98.8% graduated while 89.7% of students on free and reduced lunch did. Students with disabilities graduated at a rate of 89.2%, but there were not enough students of Asian descent to report out (see Figure 5.3). The state report card did not report any earlier school years' graduation rates.



Figure 5-3: School C graduation rates over time.

# Diploma Strength

The commonwealth of Pennsylvania measures "rigorous course of study" through Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate participation, college course enrollment, and a career and technical education program of study concentration. Per this measurement, School C has 26 rigorous courses with 79.1% of students enrolling in at least one (see Table 5.15). Of these students, 82.1% of white students were enrolled while 56.4% of economically oppressed students were. Of students with disabilities, 41.5% were in a rigorous course of study. There were insufficient data for other student subgroups.

	White	FRPL	SWD
2018-19	82.1%	56.4%	41.5%

Table 5-15: Students enrolled in at least one "rigorous course" at School C, 2018-19.

### State Standardized Tests

In English Language Arts, 87.2% of students passed the statewide exam in 2019 (see Table 5.16). Asian students passed at a rate of 96.8% while 87.8% of white students passed. There was insufficient data for other student racial demographics. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 64.3% while 41.7% of students with disabilities passed. There was insufficient data for ELL students passing.

	Asian	White	FRPL	SWD
2018-19	96.8%	87.8%	64.3%	41.7%
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Table 5-16: Student state ELA pass rates at School C, 2018-19.

The state reports include only Algebra I for mathematics (see Table 5.17). On this test, 84.3% of students passed. Asian students passed at a rate of 87.1% while 86.8% of white students passed. There was insufficient data for other student racial demographics. Of economically oppressed students, 62.8% passed with 28.6% of students with disabilities passed.

	Asian	White	FRPL	SWD
2018-19	87.1%	86.8%	62.8%	28.6%

Table 5-17: Student state algebra I test pass rate at School C, 2018-19.

The state reports include only biology for science. On this test, 85.5% of students passed. Asian students passed at a rate of 96.8% while 86% of white students passed. As with the other

tests, there was insufficient data for other student racial groups. For economically oppressed students, 65.1% of students passed while 47.2% of students with disabilities passed (see Table 5.18).

	Asian	White	FRPL	SWD
2018-19	96.8%	86%	65.1%	47.2%
	~ .			~ ~ .

Table 5-18: Student state biology test pass rate at School C, 2018-19.

# School D

This school has managed to offer IB courses to most eleventh and twelfth graders with few exceptions. School D enrolled 1087 students during the 2018-19 school year. Of these students, 7% were Black, 12% were Latinx, 3% were Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 76% were white. Multiracial students made up 2% of the student body (see Table 5.26 for a side-byside comparison of each school's racial demographics). Students with disabilities made up 15% of the student body while 1% of the student body are English Language Learners. Economically oppressed students are 18% of the student body and 1% of students are unhoused (see Table 5.27 for a side-by-side comparison of each school's non-racial demographics).

#### Advanced Placement Classes

School D does offer a few AP classes in mathematics. In 2015-16's OCR data collection, the school reported fewer students enrolled in AP classes with 16.92% of students taking at least one AP class. Of these students, 86% are white, 2.2% are multiracial, 5.6% are Latinx, 2.2% are Black, and 3.9% are Asian. In 2017-18, there was a slight increase in AP enrollment (18.65%). Of these enrollees, 3.8% were Asian, and 2.9% were Black. Latinx students made up 5.9% of AP course enrollees while multiracial students were 2.0%. White students made up 85.3% of AP enrollees.

In 2017-18, 204 students enrolled (18.65%). Of these enrollees, 3.8% were Asian, and 2.9% were Black. Latinx students made up 5.9% of AP course enrollees while multiracial students were 2.0%. White students made up 85.3% of AP enrollees. No ELL students enrolled, and students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 5.4% of AP course takers. Once again, Asian and white students were overrepresented while all other student groups, except for multiracial students, were underrepresented. Multiracial students were statistically equal in AP and school enrollment respectively. Enrollment proportions for subgroups measured both years were virtually unchanged (see Table 5.19).

	Asian	Black	Multiracial	Latinx	White	ELL	SWD
2015-16	3.9%	2.2%	2.2%	5.6%	86%	ND	ND
2017-18	3.8%	2.9%	2.0%	5.9%	85.3%	0%	5.4%

Table 5-19: Advanced Placement enrollment at School D over time

**Exam Taking**. According to the OCR data, all students enrolled in an AP course also took the AP exam in 2017-18. Thus, the proportions were the same for exam takers as they were for enrollees. Once again, Asian and white students were overrepresented while all other student groups, except for multiracial students, were underrepresented. Multiracial students were statistically equal in school enrollment and AP test taking.

## International Baccalaureate program.

Of the entire student body in 2015-16, 25.71% were enrolled in IB courses. Of these students, 86.4% were white, 2.6% were multiracial, 5.9% were Latinx, 2.6% were Black, and 2.6% were Asian.

The 2017-18 OCR data collection also reported census data for IB enrollment. Out of the 1094 students enrolled at School D, 464 (42.41%) enrolled in IB courses. Of these students, 4.3% were Asian and 4.5% were Black. Latinx students made up 7.1% of IB enrollees, and 1.7% were multiracial. White students were 82.3% of IB enrollees. White and Asian students were

overrepresented while Black and Latinx students were underrepresented. Multiracial students were exactly equal in IB enrollment and school enrollment. ELLs made up 0.4% of IB enrollees while students with IDEA-designated disabilities were 4.7% Both were underrepresented relative to their total school enrollment. The OCR data did not report enrollment of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (see Table 5.18).

	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific Islanders	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD (IDEA)
ІВ	0.043	0.045	0	0.071	0.017	0	0.823	0.004	N/A	0.047
School Pop	0.033	0.073	0	0.104	0.017	0	0.772	0.012	0.149	0.061
RCI	1.303030303	0.6164383562	N/A	0.6826923077	1	N/A	1.066062176	0.33333333333	N/A	0.7704918033
School Pop RCI	0.033 1.303030303	0.073 0.6164383562	0 N/A	0.104	0.017	0 N/A	0.772	0.012 0.3333333333	0.149 N/A	0.7704

*Table 5-20: School D IB RIs, 2017-18.* 

There was a large increase in enrollment in 2017-18 compared to 2015-16. Asian, Black, and Latinx students all saw increases in enrollment. White student enrollment proportion in IB decreased slightly and there was no statistical difference for multiracial students. Thee 2015-16 data collection did not report IB demographics for ELLs, students with disabilities, or economically oppressed students.

# College Admissions Test Taking

According to the OCR data from 2015-16, 33.65% of students took college admissions tests. Of those students, 80.3% were white. Multiracial students made up 2% of college admissions test takers, and Latinx students were 8.7%. Black students made up 5.3% of these test takers, and Asian students were 3.7%.

During the 2017-18 school year, 395 students at School D (36.11%) took the SAT or ACT. Of those test takers, 4.1% were Asian, and 4.8% were Black. Latinx students made up 12.7% of test takers and 2.8% were multiracial. White students were 75.7% of test takers while 4.3% had an IDEA-designated disability. No ELL students took college admissions tests. Within these subgroups, Black students, ELLs, and students with disabilities were underrepresented. Latinx and multiracial students were overrepresented. Asian and white students took the test at rates similar to their enrollment in the school. Compared to the 2015-16 data, Asian, Latinx, and multiracial students all saw an increase in college admissions test taking in 2017-18. The proportion of Black students taking the SAT or ACT stayed the same and the proportion of white students decreased slightly (see Table 5.21).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	SWD
2015-16	3.7%	5.3%	8.7%	2%	80.3%	ND	ND
2017-18	4.1%	4.8%	12.7%	2.8%	75.7%	0%	ND

Table 5-21: College admissions testing rates over time at School D.

# Graduation Rates

In 2019, 99.6% of students graduated. Of Asian students, 100% graduated while 97.1% of Black students graduated. Among Latinx students, 98.4% graduated while 99.5% of white students graduated. Students with disabilities graduated at a rate of 96.9%, and 97.1% of economically oppressed students graduated. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups (see Figure 5.4).



Figure 5-4: School D graduation rates over time

## **State Standardized Tests**

Of the students taking the state English Language Arts exam during the 2018-19 school year, 98% scored in the proficient range or above. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 85% while Asian students passed at a rate of 100%. Black students passed at a rate of 95% while Latinx students passed at a rate of 89%. White students passed at a rate of 99% and 100% of multiracial student passed. Of the economically oppressed students at the school, 92% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups (see Table 5.22).

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	FRPL	SWD
2018-19	100%	95%	89%	100%	99%	92%	85%
Table 5-22: State ELA pass rates at School D. 2018-19.							

The state of New York reports mathematics test scores in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II (see Table 5.23). In Algebra I, 67% of students scored proficient or above on the exam. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 63% while 54% of Latinx students passed. White students passed at a rate of 85%, and 33% of English Language Learners passed. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 64%. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

In Geometry, 87% of students passed. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 70% while 88% of Asian students passed. Black students passed at a rate of 54%, and 75% of Latinx students passed. White students passed at a rate of 92%, and 100% of multiracial students passed. Of economically oppressed students, 66% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

On the Algebra II state exam, 91% of students scored a proficient or higher. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 54% while 76% of Black students passed. Latinx students

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
Algebra I	ND	ND	54%	ND	85%	33%	64%	63%
Algebra II	ND	76%	72%	ND	95%	ND	63%	54%
Geometry	88%	54%	75%	100%	92%	ND	66%	70%

passed at a rate of 72% while 95% of white students passed. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 63%. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

Table 5-23: State mathematics test pass rates at School D, 2018-19.

For the sciences, the ESSA report card contains information about the biology, earth science, chemistry, and physics tests (see Table 5.24). Of all the students who took the biology test, 98% passed. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 91% while 100% of Asian students passed. Black students passed at a rate 81%, and 95% of Latinx students passed. White and multiracial students passed at a rate of 100% while 92% of economically oppressed students passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

Students did not fare as well on the earth science test. Only 60% of students scored at proficient or above. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 52% while 67% of Black students passed. Only 45% of Latinx students passed while 33% of ELL students passed. Among economically oppressed students, 58% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

On the chemistry test, 78% of students scored at proficient or above. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 52% while 50% of Black students passed. Latinx students passed at a rate of 43%, and 86% of white students passed. Of economically oppressed students, only 38% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

On the physics test, 85% of students scored at a proficient level of above. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 90%, and 67% of Black students passed. Of Latinx students, 100% passed while 85% of white students passed. Among economically oppressed students, 63% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
Biology	100%	81%	95%	100%	100%	ND	ND	91%
Chemistry	ND	50%	43%	ND	86%	ND	38%	52%
Earth	ND	67%	45%	ND	ND	33%	58%	52%
Science								
Physics	ND	67%	100%	ND	86%	ND	63%	ND

Table 5-24: State science test results at School D, 2017-18.

For social studies, the ESSA report card included test results for global history and geography along with United States history (see Table 5.25). In global history and geography, 92% of students passed. Students with disabilities passed at a rate of 72%. While 60% of Asian students passed, 88% of Black students passed. Latinx students passed at a rate of 75%, and 96% of white students passed. Multiracial students passed at a rate of 100% while 50% of ELL students passed. Economically oppressed students passed at a rate of 76%. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

On the US History test, 97% of students scored in the proficient range or above. Among students with disabilities, 95% passed. Asian students passed at a rate of 100% while 90% of Black students passed. Latinx students passed at a rate of 81%, and 100% of white and multiracial students passed. Among economically oppressed students, 84% passed. The numbers were too low to report out for other subgroups.

	Asian	Black	Latinx	Multiracial	White	ELL	FRPL	SWD
Global	60%	88%	75%	100%	96%	ND	76%	72%
Hist. &								
Geo.								

US	100%	90%	81%	100%	100%	ND	84%	95%
History								

Fable 5-25: State social students tes	pass rates at School D, 2017-18.
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	Asian	Black	Filipino	Indigenous	Latinx	Multiracial	Pacific	White
							Islander	
School	3.4%	1.4%	1.5%	0.4%	59.1%	3.9%	2.1%	28.2%
Α								
School	5.7%	28.6%	N/A	N/A	12.7%	6.6%	N/A	46.3%
В								
School	8.2%	5.6%	N/A	N/A	7.1%	0.9%	N/A	78.3%
С								
School	3.3%	7.3%	N/A	N/A	10.4%	1.7%	N/A	77.2%
D								

Table 5-26: Racial demographics across schools, 2018-19.

	ELL	FRPL	504	SWD
			Students	
School	19.5%	52.5%	N/A	15.8%
Α				
School	11%	38%	N/A	14.2%
В				
School	2.2%	0%	8.6%	12.6%
С				
School	1.2%	14.9%	6.1%	14.1%
D				

Table 5-27: Non-racial subgroups across schools, 2018-19.

# **Research Question 2b Findings**

The third research question, how do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracked programs, seeks to understand the mechanisms by which school leaders can improve student outcomes while detracking their schools. By examining the first two research questions from a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources, I identified five supports school leaders gave that seemed like particularly important foundational steps in terms of student outcomes in detracking programs. School leaders demonstrated a commitment to the promises of equity and heterogeneity. Leaders also created and sustained a culture of honors work. Focusing on student support paid dividends for students, as did leveraging community resources. Finally, supporting teachers in navigating detracking work also supported successful student outcomes in these detracking programs.

#### **Commitment to the Promises of Equity and Heterogeneity**

Detracking reforms at multiple schools were situated in discussions about values. While shared values do not necessarily yield immediate results, they are foundations on which to continue to build student success. Throughout his interview, Principal A kept coming back to discussions with faculty, students, community members and district administrators about the school's values. Principal A noted that he finds it easier to frame the discussion in terms of shared values. "You start talking about equity and you start putting your instructional vision out there and your values out there, and you get people to talk about their values and they're all shared values," he said.

Asking questions about values has also helped to alleviate some parents' concerns about detracking and the "dumbing down" of curriculum, according to Principal A.

If I were to advocate for [re-tracking], what would that look along socioeconomic and racial lines? Is that really the school that we want to be? Is that in line with our values? Because people are talking about the kids. They're not necessarily seeing the broader impacted. But you see, you have to really strategically steer away from that in a way that doesn't alienate people.

After ESSA allowed for districts to have greater flexibility in testing students, students at School B took writing and reading tests based on their English level. As the detracking reforms have moved forward, however, the department has unified the testing. All students now take the statewide test. This move has allowed teachers to create the same expectations even with the two different levels. "All classes should be teaching the same skillset and have the same common assessments," English teacher B said. Unifying testing has also led to teachers unifying expectations for students. This unification has also happened in the larger honors classes with more students now taking honors. The assistant principal who oversees the department has been instrumental in helping teachers adjust to this shift, according to English Teacher B. She has communicated "we need to have the same expectations for all of our students across the board and it needs to be high," English Teacher B said.

AP B1 described an administrative team that is completely bought in to the idea of detracking and the detracking program at School B in particular. She noted that this unity makes it easier both to support teachers and to respond to parents' concerns. "Once it was like, 'This is what we're doing,' and that we weren't going to back down, and we truly believe in the equity work that were doing as a school and as a division, this is one way we can do that."

Principal C also noted that his school has only successfully gotten rid of their lowest track while other tracks remain. In some subjects, accelerated honors has also disappeared. These compressions of tracks have, according to Principal C, made it easier for students to pursue higher-level courses. "By eliminating that level and saying hey, let's challenge yourselves. Go from CCP [College and Career Prep, the lowest level] to Honors, Honors to AP, by taking that extra layer off there, it's easier to get up to that higher level." The data explored in research question two bears this out.

CSD noted several times her belief in students rising to high expectations. "In my experience, most people rise to the expectation," she said. She also noted the supports she and her colleagues provide students to meet those expectations. Differentiation within the classroom is a big part of that support. "The teachers have been trained to differentiate instruction within

the classroom," she said. "And then the support that we make available to kids who may struggle, we do have extra supports set up for them."

DAP4 serves as the International Baccalaureate coordinator for School D, and she noted several ways in which the IB program provided a strong structure for the detracking program. She noted how teachers have embraced the program. "Having the detracking, having IB for all made such a huge difference, because other kids served as models for kids who might have been knuckleheads in other classes," she said.

Principal D credits his getting the job at Southside High School with his embrace of heterogeneity as an educational concept.

I think one of the reasons that I got the job here 23 years ago is I used the word heterogeneous in three different lines on my resume. And detracking and heterogeneity are not synonymous, but they are symbiotic. Detracking does not mean that you wake up one day and eliminate the tracks that you now have and funnel all the students in towards one class. That's not what detracking is in a practical sense.

#### **Creating a Culture of Honors Work**

School A is an International Baccalaureate school. This designation began about twenty years ago amidst declining enrollment for the school. District administrators thought IB would be a way to draw families from the neighborhood back to the school. The program, however, initially created a "school within a school" where many white students were placed in the IB-prep and IB classes while the Latinx students were in the lower-level classes. Principal A found a way around this problem, however, through detracking. By moving to create a pre-IB program intended for all students, detracking could more easily take place. IB as an institution also provided support for detracking, according to Principal A:

The work at [School A] I think probably really was jump-started in 2014 when we were chosen to be part of the study through the International Baccalaureate Organization. We were one of five high schools that were chosen to explore how to expand access to our diploma program and certificate program to students who were free reduced lunch eligible. It was compatible with I think what our values were as a community and as an organization, but it provided us with a lot of structure and some consultants and I think some accountability to actually get the work done, implement the work.

DAP2 also noted that participation in the IB program helps School D detrack with high expectations for all students. Because all students are in pre-IB courses in ninth and tenth grade, they do not see themselves as smart or not. He contrasted this with his previous experience at a highly tracked school.

Kids will certainly still run into roadblocks in their classes but it's viewed as, almost from an advantage standpoint where we can find supports to help those kids, it's not because of the label that they have coming into the class. So I guess in a roundabout way, I think what it does is it creates this culture that every kid can learn, every kid should learn and we don't group the kids based on perceived ability or prior achievement, per se, we give every kid the opportunity to rise.

The focus of the detracking program at School B has been leveling up for all students, according to BAP2. "In addition to providing educational access I think leveling up also does what I feel like public schools are not designed for, but what can happen in public schools is students get an opportunity to experience, to go through school, and have meaningful experiences with students who are not necessarily like them," he said. In this assertion, he joined a number of his colleagues.

According to Principal C, there has not been any community backlash in terms of removing the lowest level course and encouraging more students to take Advanced Placement

classes. Including parents in this process was, according to Principal C, the most important piece of mitigating any negative feedback. He noted that the change "was actually part of our comprehensive plan, so we had parents that were involved as part of that process. When you involve the parents, teachers, administration, across the board in that process, the communication process, and really make it transparent, I can say I didn't get one email or pushback from any parent."

#### **Focusing on Student Support**

All of the schools studied provided explicit supports for students who may not traditionally be in honors classes. At School A, for example, the principal outlined specific work designed to make content more culturally relevant for students who are new to the United States. School C provides interventions for students who may be struggling in advanced classes before letting them drop down a level. School B participates in a program known as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which is designed to give support to students who may be first generation college students. This focus on AVID often comes at the expense of other students, according to Instructional Coach B. "We focus a lot of our data almost exclusively on AVID students," she said. "The number of students who are in AVID is minuscule compared to the entire population." She also noted that AVID resources, while useful for students enrolled in the program, are not shared with others who may benefit from them. "AVID has an extra budget of \$40,000 just for AVID kids throughout the school," she said. "And those resources are not shared."

Throughout her interview, CSD spoke at length about students' needs and how she and her colleagues in leadership work to support them. She outlined a team of counselors, psychologists, and social workers who help both students and parents "because there are a lot of parents who deal with their students' frustration at home who then reach out to the school for help. So the counseling goes along with that, and I think that's very important."

**Minimizing Prerequisites.** All of the leadership teams at the schools studied worked to minimize both the number and actual practice of prerequisites for advanced courses. School A has done away with all prerequisites in English and social studies. Principal C spoke explicitly about having an attitude of letting students and parents override even the few stated prerequisites. "There's no necessarily thing that says prerequisite. At the end of the day, parents can override any course."

In the science department at School D, for example, prerequisites will not keep students from taking a particular course. "The program of studies probably makes reference to prerequisites," he said, "but it's not enforced." Prerequisites are seen as a "suggestion" and presented to students as "a better chance to be more successful" but not as a requirement, according to Science Chair D.

**Relationship Building.** School leaders at each of the schools spoke at length about the importance of relationship building for detracking to succeed. Social Studies Chair B explained about "classroom circles" used at the beginning of each unit " which are non-academic but they're really just meant to improve classroom and culture through relationship and trust between students and between me and students."

Counseling services for students to deal with both in- and out-of-school issues were important at all four of the studied schools. CSD shared in particular the consultations counselors provide for teachers who are concerned about students. Counselors also work with students to help them manage their time in an often academically challenging program. "I think that sometimes those extracurricular commitments become, you know, they distract them," she said. "So they have to find a balance. And that's one of the things that the counselors do work with them on is find that balance."

**Special Education Students.** Students with special needs were a particular focus of school leaders at Schools B and D. School B AP1 oversees the special education department and is a former special education teacher. As such, she portrayed particular passion about students with disabilities have been included in the detracking program. As the special education department supervisor, AP B1 also reported working to make sure that special education teachers are including in planning for detracking. "I think for especially my SPED teachers, it's supporting their work and understanding that they're going to have to do their job even more now than they did before," she said "in terms of differentiating and scaffolding and making sure they're working on specially designed instructions." She also noted her delight that for the first time students with disabilities have unfettered access to higher-level courses at School B.

Although students' IEPs may require they be in collaborative classes, Principal B outlined a movement to make those collaborative classes honors-option. "Just because a student has an IEP doesn't mean they can't do honors work," Principal B said. One impressive detail that stood out to me was how students with special needs have access to higher-level math throughout the detracking program. According to DAP2, collaborative special education teachers are placed even in Advanced Placement calculus in order to support students with IEPs and other special needs.

I think it builds some self-esteem when kids know that they're not necessarily placed in the "lower level math" but you also have to be careful too, it can be intimidating for a kid that, 'Listen, reality is I struggle at math and I'm with a class that's moving quickly and there are kids in here that are really, really bright.' And that can also be a challenge too. So it's not all roses, you have to be able to see the situation and again, make sure kids are supported fully.

According to DAP3, collaborative special education teachers work in higher level classes, including higher level math courses. Nearly all of the assistant principals noted that having two teachers in a classroom is very normal at School D. "You have a second teacher or a teaching assistant, two adults," DAP3 said. "One is in front of the room and the other is helping kids, and that's seen as everyday.

## Leveraging Community Resources

According to Principal D, language barriers for ELL students and economic hardship for economically oppressed students are two of the most significant barriers to student success in the detracking program. Two particular community groups have helped support these students outside of school and improved access to higher-level work in the detracking program. "We've had community members working with us to get wireless connectivity, computer access, curriculum availability," he said, "to make that experience more powerful over there as it is here and to open up communication even more than it had been in the past."

# **Supporting Teachers**

## *Communication*

School leaders explained that communication with teachers was particularly important in implementing and sustaining detracking. AP B1 noted two teacher mindsets that often hamper detracking efforts at School B: attitudes toward behavior and beliefs about homework. Teachers often see behavior as a proxy for which level a student belongs to. Students who don't complete homework are also often seen as not "honors material." AP B1, however, noted that the administration has worked with teachers to overcome these deficit mindsets. "There was one kid

this year that was in, I forget what academic level class he was in, but that kid didn't have any behavior problems in his honors class," she shared. "The expectations around behavior were different and he rose to that."

At School B, as at others, teachers played a key role in bringing about detracking. This school has had five principals since 2012, so teachers had become very self-directed. One teacher in particular began working on an "unleveled" ninth grade English class in which students could choose to do honors-level work and earn honors credit. Building on the success of that class, other teachers began to advocate for similar models in their own work. In this way, the detracking initiative "bubbled up" with support from various administrators, include Principal B.

"It could be a top-down initiative in the framework, but moving forward, we cannot do it top-down," Principal B said. Teachers are "the experts in the field. They're the content experts. They're the ones that are better going to implement this. So here's the direction we need to go, here's what I want to see, but how does that look like in each classroom?"

As discussed previously, Math Chair B noted that she has attempted to cultivate a growth mindset within her department for both students and teachers." Standards-based grading also provided a way for teachers to help students cultivate growth mindsets. Math Chair B also noted that tracking can frustrate aims to help student realize they can grow in their math skills. "That's why I think unlevelling at a younger age would kind of help with that mindset," she said. "But also, I think teachers...can either push students more towards that fixed mindset, or help them have that growth mindset." Social Studies Chair B also noted that Principal B, too, clearly communicates high expectations to students. "He really does have a high bar of expectations for the students in the building."

Principal D also comes across to the faculty as a strong detracking leader, according to English Chair D. The principal encourages students to push themselves to try the IB side of the program before deciding whether or not to opt for a Regents diploma. "He tends to want students to be in the program to start," English Chair D said. "I think he much prefers when they err on the side of trying it and changing their minds afterward then regretting not having tried it." English Chair D noted that although this encouragement can hurt the school's numbers in terms of IB exams attempted, the principal is much more focused on students' experiences. "I think to be fair to him, is not helpful as far as his numbers go, to have all of these students try it and not necessarily get the diploma," the chair said. "But he's been, I think, very good about making sure everyone at least gives it a shot."

CSD saw Principal D primarily as a supporter of teachers in the detracking program. She noted that he provides support through curriculum writing and professional development. "He is 100% behind the teachers," she said. "He's very supportive. So we will offer any kind of supports that the teachers may need."

Similar to others at School D, DAP2 noted that he thinks teachers feel extremely supported by the administration in general and Principal D in particular:

Teachers in the building greatly respect him because I think he understands how challenging it is to teach in a detracked school, and while it yields such great outcomes for kids and equity issues and all those things, he does understand how challenging it can be and I think teachers know that the support is there.

## Curriculum and Assessment

At all four schools, the faculty largely write their own curriculum and assessment models to suit the interests and ability of students in their courses. This practice provides for plenty of opportunity for differentiation and is a key piece of making detracking work. Coach B noted that a great deal of her job is devoted to helping teachers write curriculum that plans scaffolding for students from all backgrounds in their work. Teacher leaders at School D also outlined the ways in which they develop curriculum and assessment specifically for differentiation. "We are charged with creating assessment models that will allow for differentiation," English Chair B said. "That is helpful in that we can make decisions as to how we're going to create accommodation for students who are seated alongside the IB students."

#### Hiring and Induction Practices

All four of the principals and many of the assistant principals spoke at length about hiring for their detracking programs. DAP3, for example, noted many differences between his previous school in a neighboring district and School D, in particular how teachers reacted to detracking" Everyone who works here, you have to buy into it, you have to believe in it. These expectations extend to teachers earning tenure as well. "If you teach in this school, it's going to be detracked," she said.

**Technical Support.** Teacher leaders in particular highlighted the ways in which technical support through materials and professional development has enhanced student outcomes in detracking. Science Chair B cited the most helpful leadership support has been making resources available to biology teachers. This support felt particularly easy to access because the school's principal is also the science department's supervising administrator. "A lot of these programs that normally you know we have to pay big bucks for, and some of them are like, oh I don't know about that," the teacher said about previous administrators. "So all the ones that we've wanted, that the biology team has wanted, our administrators have definitely supported that."

According to Math Chair D, the faculty members at that school take an active role in planning their yearly professional development concerning detracking. She noted that these yearly organizations are called collegial circles and that their topics are based on teachers' review of the previous year's data, although this year's collegial circles are focused primarily on learning during COVID-19. "We share materials with each other," she said. "We share strategies with each other. If I don't know how to do something because I've never taught this before, nobody is afraid to ask. I have to tell you, that is a critical component of the teacher end of being able to teach in a detracked school."

Similar to many of his colleagues, Science Chair D noted how much Principal D provides supports to teachers in terms of detracking. Principal D, according to Science Chair D, provides flexibility in terms of professional development and makes sure to focus on open enrollment and equal access in these sessions. Principal C is always "looking for opportunities of where we can differentiate."

#### **Summary**

# **Research Question 1**

To answer to the first research question, how do school leaders foster detracking in their schools, I looked specifically at leadership practices. Although interview participants provided diverse responses and quantitative analysis suggested some complication of those responses, some themes emerged when merging the results of the datasets (see Table 5.1). Three out of four of the case study sites demonstrated near-universal access to pre-IB or pre-AP courses. Leaders supported teachers in differentiating and changing their mindsets about whom constitutes an honors student. Leaders also sought to help the surrounding community articulate and support

values for detracking. In terms of student relationships, leaders also communicated high expectations for students.

## **Research Question 2a**

The answer to the second research question, what associations exist between school leaders' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs, intended to determine if there may be a statistical correlation between specific school leader actions and student outcomes in the cases I studied. Because data collection first occurred during the 2019-20 school year and into the 2020-21 school year, I found it impossible to collect year-end or interim data that could be reliably used to establish what correlations might exist. I did, however, come to see some potential findings based on the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data along with the state report cards regarding each school. Organizing these findings by schools seemed to make the most sense in terms of analyzing these specific data because there were not individual student test scores. Another way to think about potential associations between principals' actions and student outcomes is to think about the Representation Index (RI) of students within advanced courses. An RI is the ratio of the proportion of students in a given category in advanced courses to the proportion of students from that given category in the school itself (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Below are several tables demonstrating the RIs for each school during the 2017-18 school year.

#### **Research Question 2b**

The third research question, how do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracked programs, seeks to understand the mechanisms by which school leaders can improve student outcomes while detracking their schools. By examining the first two research questions from a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources, I identified five supports school leaders gave that seemed like particularly important foundational steps in terms of student outcomes in detracking programs. School leaders demonstrated a commitment to the promises of equity and heterogeneity. Leaders also created and sustained a culture of honors work. Focusing on student support paid dividends for students, as did leveraging community resources. Finally, supporting teachers in navigating detracking work also supported successful student outcomes in these detracking programs.

## **Next Steps**

This chapter reported findings from the qualitative interviews (N=20) and relevant quantitative data for each research questions Data were collected from four detracking high schools in four different districts throughout the United States. The next chapter analyzes and discusses these findings, particularly with respect to the conceptual framework and prior literature. I also use these finds to identify implications for school leaders, researchers, and policy makers. Finally, I will offer recommendations for future research studies that may follow from this study.

## **Chapter 6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

From this study we see that detracking programs are complex and often school specific. This finding is borne out by other research on how detracking has been implemented throughout the United States (Cone, 2006; Horn, 2006; LaPrade, 2011). By using the comparative case method discussed in chapter 3, however, several common themes begin to emerge. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings and what implications their commonalities have for practioners, policy makers, and researchers working to expand access to advanced courses for all students. I will also examine how conceptual frameworks used in the study might suggest for refining and expanding current theories used to explore school leadership for detracking.

# Review of the Research Questions, Research Design, and Methodology Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions in order to examine school principals' actions within the context of high-performing detracking programs as measured by student outcomes:

1. How do school leaders foster detracking in their schools?

2a. What associations exist between school leaders' actions and student outcomes in detracking programs?

2b. How do school leaders support successful student outcomes in detracked programs?

## **Research Design**

An initial interest in detracking student outcomes led to reviewing existing theories on leadership for minoritized students within high schools. This review then led to the creation of the research questions and continued readings on detracking, the relationship between principal actions and student outcomes, and theories concerning leadership for minoritized students. These readings supported revisions both to the conceptual framework for the study and the proposed research questions.

The study's conceptual framework offers a structure for understanding the negative influence of societal factors on student sorting and how principals who successfully subvert these factors act. Therefore, I collected data about detracking programs' organization, principals' actions within those programs, and how students fare within and after completing these programs.

The first and second research questions called for gathering data about school leaders' actions within detracking programs, detracking program structures, and student outcomes. The third research question called for merging the data collected while examining the first two questions and searching for continuity and discontinuity among the findings.

## Methodology

#### Site Selection

A preliminary review of programs of study in Virginia suggested that racial diversity was a significant predictor of the number of levels of courses offered (Sebastian, et al., under review). After calculating a diversity index similar to Kelly and Price (2011), my colleagues and I found that the difference between a d-index of 0.00 and a d-index of 1.00 is 0.71 levels per course when controlling for poverty and district size. This finding suggests that in schools with a mix of white students and students of color, tracking becomes more prevalent. As such, this finding suggests some initial inclusion criteria for creating comparative case studies among schools functioning at different levels of detracking with different diversity measures. In this study, each school will function as an exploratory case (Yin, 2018) within each of the identified quadrants (see Figure 6.1). These quadrants are designed to introduce variations that enable helpful comparability.



Figure 6-1: Preliminary quadrants of detracking and racial diversity continua. **Research Design** 

A convergent mixed methods design (see Figure 6.2) was used first to explore actions qualitatively at each of the case study sites and then to quantitively explore potential associations between school leaders' actions within the detracking program and student outcomes (QUAL+quan). Based on previous research and the realities of conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcome measures included graduation rates (Burris & Murphy, 2014), student representation in advanced courses, and available test data (T. Nomi & Allensworth, 2013).

The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of school leaders' actions in which teacher leader and building administrator interviews and documents were collected at the four sites meeting the inclusion criteria discussed above. The qualitative findings were then used to further understand student outcomes at those sites. The quantitative findings were used to describe student outcomes in these detracking programs. In the final phase, I mixed the qualitative and quantitative data in order to present a case-oriented analysis of my findings (see Figure 6.2). This chapter explores the implications of these findings for practioners, policy makers, and researchers. I also offer some analysis of the frameworks used in the study and how

they might inform future work before examining the limitations of this study and concluding with some final thoughts.



Figure 6-2: Comparative mixed methods case study.

## **Implications for Practioners**

One of the foremost goals of this study is to develop a set of best practices for school leaders undertaking detracking in their own schools. While these results are not generalizable or causal in nature, the findings do add to our knowledge about best practices in these schools that may be beneficial elsewhere. When considering the findings outlined in the previous chapter, four implications for practioners stand out. The schools studied found some measures of success in detracking by expanding access to honors classes. While expanding that access, however, also expanding supports for students also proved to be crucial. In considering the findings from department leaders in particular, a need for teacher education for detracking emerged. Examining the quantitative data, however, demonstrated a need to grapple with data that demonstrates potential challenges

# **Expanding Honors**

Three of the four schools studied focused on expanding honors classes with explicit preparation in the lower grades for advanced classes in the eleventh and twelfth grade. The fourth school focused on eliminating the lowest track in many subjects. For the schools that expanded honors classes, there did seem to be a subsequent increase with enrollment in upperlevel classes in later years for many subgroups. The school that eliminated lower tracks also had some increase in racially and economically oppressed students in upper-level classes but not at the same rate as the other three schools.

## **Expanding Supports**

One unexpected finding was the degree to which school leaders committed themselves to having students with disabilities take and succeed in higher level classes. As the supervisor of special education at School B pointed out, "They might have a disability in reading or writing that might impact their ability to access some of the content from a traditional standpoint, but it doesn't mean they can't understand the concepts or we can't scaffold things to make it accessible for them. Why should they be deprived of that opportunity just because of their disability?" Students with disabilities have been notably absent in much detracking research with a few exceptions (Burris & Welner, 2005; Collins & Gan, 2013) so these school leaders' work to expand supports in honors classes is particularly notable.

School leaders also discussed expanding supports for students struggling under the workload of more advanced courses. Providing students with access to counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other caring adults was a hallmark of all of the schools studied. School leaders also reported expanding supports after recognizing that many barriers to student success in detracked classes existed outside of schools. Providing students' families with access to community resources, for example, can in turn help students focus on schoolwork.

# **Teacher Education**

The qualitative findings explored in chapter 5 reveal a need for more robust teacher education around detracking practices in the classroom. All of the school principals interviewed discussed professional development as key to their efforts to detrack. Interviews with teacher leaders, however, demonstrated different levels of understanding how to implement detracking practices so that more students could have success in the classroom. As Social Studies Chair D pointed out, "I think [teacher] support hinges on the level of communication and openness in the implementation of any program that takes place. When programs are dictated without really creating a grassroots understanding of the program and the support for the program and an openness to feedback and constructive criticism, when that doesn't happen, I think the support is tenuous at best." More robust and coherent professional development is also supported by the literature (Horn, 2010; Fred M. Newmann et al., 2000; Suprayogi et al., 2017).

## **Tackling Difficult Data**

The quantitative data explored in chapter 5 demonstrated that none of the schools studied had achieved equitable representation of all oppressed student groups in their advanced classes. Each school's data demonstrated an overrepresentation of white students while other groups remained underrepresented. These data are very different from the pictures most school leaders painted in their interviews. The unwillingness to examine difficult data and determine what it means for students in detracking programs was summed up by Instructional Coach B. "I feel like we have to have some clear data analysis on a pretty ongoing basis to determine whether or not we're meeting the metrics that we set," she said. "I also think that there has to be procedures

around what kind of training teachers will need to help them change their mindsets as well as their pedagogy to support students who are now receiving a wider range of opportunities. "For detracking programs to succeed, school leaders need to be willing to take a hard look at data that might undermine their professed achievements. Careful data analysis can help to identify gaps in detracking programs and examine why students of color, economically oppressed students, and students with disabilities may be excluded from advanced courses.

## **Implications for Policy Makers**

#### **Data Collection**

The necessity of relying partially on quantitative data collected by state and national departments of education because of COVID cancelling school-based assessments revealed a need to better measure what is happening in detracking programs. Data from the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education was not reported on scheduled. The data collected also varied year to year in ways that made comparisons difficult. While OCR reported Advanced Placement enrollment and pass rates by multiple subgroups, they did not offer the same data for International Baccalaureate courses or other advanced courses unless they were classed as "dual enrollment". A more careful accounting of course enrollment at the national level could help us to identify schools that are doing a good job of expanding student access to advanced courses and those that need more help.

# **Diploma Types**

Three of the four states in the study offered multiple types of diplomas–a general option and an advanced option. Educational policy makers at the state level should consider how these different types of diplomas create incentives to track students and keep some from accessing advanced courses. Particularly troubling was the finding at School B that the few students who had been placed in self-contained English classes were not taking the same state assessments as their peers in the detracked classes. Although the state accepts these tests for verified credits toward a standard diploma, state policy is unclear how taking them might affect a student later attempting to earn an advanced diploma. Thus, bifurcated diploma offerings can hem students in to one path and encourage tracking.

#### **Professional Development for Leaders**

One key to sustaining detracking programs is support for school leaders. This support can come in multiple forms from policy makers at both the state and national level. While districts can often provide professional development for teachers at scale, they may struggle to do the same for administrators. Departments of education could help districts in this work by supporting professional development for school leaders that focuses on the best practices of detracking. Departments of education could host institutes for school leaders engaged in and seeking to engage in detracking. Departments could use the data collection suggested above to help guide school leaders' learning about detracking in their schools.

## **Implications for Future Research**

This study focused on the experiences of school leaders in order to begin to understand how their actions could impact student outcomes. As discussed above, there is a need to explore how to best engage teachers in professional development. Furthermore, due to the nature of the way in which data had to be collected during the pandemic, no causal claims can be made. This lack provides opportunities for multiple lines of inquiry for future research. Student voice is also notably absent and could provide another rich opportunity for further research.

# **Detracking and Professional Development**

As discussed above, more robust and coherent professional development for detracking could improve student outcomes. While there is a great deal of literature into what makes for successful professional development (Christopher, 2019; LaPrade, 2011; Sebastian &

Allensworth, 2012), not much specifically covers detracking. Working with schools implementing detracking, researchers might investigate modes and methods of helping teachers implement detracking in their classrooms.

# **Exploring Causal Links**

Although this study initially aimed to measure causal links between school leaders' actions and student outcomes, data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic made this impossible. Future research should consider what school leader actions we can causally identify as mattering for student outcomes in detracking programs. By clearly identifying these actions, future school leaders of detracking programs can be better prepared to improve outcomes for students.

#### **Students in Detracking Programs**

The most notable set of voices missing from this study is those of students. Student voice could triangulate the data collected from school leaders and quantitative data reports. Student experience is also important to analyze in detracking programs because we know that while students of color are more likely to be placed in lower tracks (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Béteille, 2013), these classes are also more likely to be taught by teachers of color (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013). Recent evidence has emerged that marginalized students taught by same-race teachers have better outcomes than students of color taught by white teachers (Egalite et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2018). What happens when these students are placed in detracked and advanced courses? What happens if the number of white teachers a student of color has increases? These are important research questions to consider moving forward with detracking research.

# **Implications for Conceptual Development**

This study's use of five different conceptual frameworks foregrounded and backgrounded throughout the qualitative data analysis offers implications for developing a new conceptual understanding of the intersection of school leadership and detracking. Exploring these framework findings will help to develop a new conceptual framework as this line of research continues (for a more detailed review of framework coding results see Appendix E). In my initial framework findings, I noticed a particular need for a framework that helps make practice explicit and gives educators, especially white educators, tools to talk about the role that race plays in shaping detracking programs.



Figure 6-3: Use of framework codes within all participant interviews.

# **Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory**

Cultural reproduction theory suggests that distinctions attributed to dominant groups function as "capital" (Bourdieu, 1987). Those holding a given distinction can then spend that capital within a particular social exchange (Bourdieu, 1987). Social exchanges take place in the context of human interactions where one person gives or receives anything of value to or from another (Bourdieu, 1987). Thus, cultural capital functions to reproduce existing class structures. Understanding how students are sorted into classes through this lens views choices about student recommendations as a social exchange, with placement in high-level courses seen as valuable. Bourdieu's theory helps those seeking to lead schools equitably understand how students' cultural capital works in those exchanges. His work can also help those researching school leaders conceptualize the different exchanges of cultural capital underlying leaders' decisions. Chambers and colleagues (2014), for example, use Bourdieu to understand how social inequalities are often exacerbated by the tracking decisions made in schools. The authors conclude "schools are complicit in the perpetuation and maintenance of social and economic stratification" (p. 468) through tracking practices.

Bourdieu's work also provides an important critique of other frameworks that suggest schools are designed to overcome inequality. In exploring how one such frame, multiculturalism, may actually help to undermine efforts at expanding educators' understandings of what counts as cultural capital, Olneck (2000), expanding on Bourdieu, observed that formal education functions to re-create dominant structures. Olneck delineates three types of cultural capital at work in classrooms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Olneck's framework makes clear that for school leaders attempting to practice equality through their leadership, understanding the mechanisms of cultural capital is key to undermining the dominance of any one culture in a school. For researchers, understanding this expansion of Bourdieu's work using these three types of cultural capital can help guide the evaluation of student sorting programs—including those that educators claim serve student interests.

The Cultural Reproduction Theory codes provided the dominant sources of coding in 17 out of 20 of the qualitative interviews. Interviewees described many social exchanges within their detracking programs. The type of social capital used most frequently in these exchanges was institutionalized cultural capital. In some instances, particularly at School D, going to a
school with a detracking program has become the institutionalized cultural capital. In other schools, particularly School B, institutionalized cultural capital existed in terms of having parents to whom the school is most responsive. Also notable at School B, the master schedule functioned as a form of cultural capital in terms of orchestra, band, and math driving how students are placed in classes, even ones that are ostensibly detracked.



Figure 6-4: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from all interviews

#### **Critical Race Theory**

As discussed at length in Chapter 2, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines and criticizes how race and racism function in social systems (Delgado et al., 2017). Four CRT themes are particularly important to the study of school leadership for tracking and detracking and add to Bourdieu's work discussed above: 1) the permanence of racism in life in the U.S., 2) skepticism regarding assertions of neutrality, 3) the assertion that nothing changes related to race unless it also serves white interests (interest convergence), and 4) the challenging of analyses of educational practices that do not take race into account (Ladson-Billings, 1998). These themes provide an additional theoretical rationale for the study of

the coding of qualitative data and an additional set of assumptions to consider and test in developing assertations about how school leaders devise student sorting programs.

Critical Race Theory provided the least number of framework codes in seventeen out of twenty of the participant interviews. In the remaining three, CRT came in fourth place twice and third place once. This finding was quite surprising in that all of the schools were racially heterogeneous is some way. In initial planning, I had assumed that CRT would play a much larger role in understanding the links between school leadership and student outcomes in detracking programs. This finding suggests that school leaders, particularly white school leaders, need tools to help them talk more explicitly about race so that they can in turn address how race and racism may affect their students.

Ghi			
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism	erasing race	Interest convergence

Figure 6-5: Critical Race Theory coding across all participant interviews

#### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

With the structural and institution bases of cultural reproduction theory and critical race theory, culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) combines many conceptual understandings of serving students who are minoritized due to their lack of cultural capital (Khalifa, et al, 2016) along with enhancing specific practices leaders can take to improve student learning (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). CRSL provides a way to discuss these practices in a larger framework that values minoritized students while considering the institutional barriers that can harm minoritized students. Principals practicing CRSL work on overcoming their own biases while assisting teachers in doing so as well, identifying and dismantling barriers to student success, and enacting culturally responsive instructional leadership. Understanding CRSL as a lens for research can provide source material for the proposed survey construction along with valuable tools for analyzing the qualitative data that will help drive the survey creation.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership played less of a role in framework coding than I had initially anticipated. Interviewees mainly highlighted the ways in which their administrators both identified and dismantled barriers to student success. Most interviewees saw the previous tracking systems as barriers to student success due to their discriminatory nature. Some interviewees also spoke about outside factors and how school leaders helped students to address those factors.

CRSL		
(dentifying barriers to minoritized students) success	Dismannling barriers to minoritized students success	Educators over
	Culturally responsive instructional feadorship	

Figure 6-6: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding from all interviews

# **Opportunity to Learn**

Carroll (1989) first introduced the concept of OTL as a relationship between the time needed to learn content and the time students spend learning that content. Schmidt, Cogan, Houang, and McKnight (2011) advanced a "definition of OTL as content" because "the profession of content is the fundamental rationale of schooling and the education system," and "this is an aspect of schooling that both reflects education policy and is amenable to education police reform" (p. 400).

**OTL and student organization.** Differences in OTL among tracked groups of students may account for some of the differences in outcomes for these students. Barnard-Brak and colleagues (2018) found that even students who had similar test scores yet had lower OTL were less likely to answer mathematics questions correctly than students with higher OTL. According to Arnold-Berkovits and colleagues (2019), time spent on instruction correlated with higher test scores.

**OTL and minoritized students.** OTL differences can be particularly acute in terms of outcomes for students who lack access to cultural capital. Schmidt et al. (2015) found not only is there a positive relationship between student socioeconomic status (SES) and OTL but nearly one-third of the SES relationship to reading achievement is due to the association between SES and OTL. Drawing on the foregrounded perspectives and Sorensen's organizational theory, OTL adds an important dimension to researching how school leaders can best act in terms of detracking.

Opportunity to learn was neither an underwhelming or overwhelming source of coding throughout each of these interviews. In most interviews, OTL was in the middle of the pack. Within the coding, participants mostly discussed student organization. This finding makes sense when considering that all of these schools are continually reorganizing to maximize students' opportunity to learn by providing more students with advanced courses. Similar to the discussion on Critical Race Theory, explicit discussion of minoritized students was difficult or nonexistent for most white educators.

012
Student organization Minoritized students

Figure 6-7: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding across all interview participants

### Sorensen's Theory of Organizational Differentiation

Sorensen's framework for "organizational differentiation" (1970) names four dimensions for evaluating how students are organized into tracked classes: scope, electivity, selectivity, and inclusivity. By using these dimensions to understand how school leaders are acting related to detracking, this framework can inform both qualitative data collection and the development of a quantitative instrument. Despite the age of this framework, several recent studies have continued to demonstrate Sorensen's contemporary currency. For example, Kelly & Price (2011) used the framework to explain tracking at work throughout the state of North Carolina. By using these dimensions to understand how school leaders are acting related to detracking, this framework informed my understanding of detracking work at these schools. Inclusivity and selectivity played the two biggest roles in this round of data coding.

In Sorensen's framework (1970), inclusivity encompasses the demographics of students in particular levels as well as their future options as a result of that leveling. Inclusivity played a role in these schools largely as the impetus for detracking. School leaders expressed discomfort at being able to identify a course level based on the racial make up the students within a classroom.

Selectivity concerns the number of levels of courses offered in each department. Sorensen measures selectivity as an effort to have the "proper" type of student in each course. This dimension analyzes sorting as a means to create levels to match perceived student ability. Understanding inclusivity and selectivity can be helpful in understanding educators' resistance (LeBlanc, 2014) or embrace (Godley, et al., 2015) of detracking. Selectivity played a role in these schools' detracking programs as school leaders worked to expand the idea of who is a "proper" student to have in an advanced course. Student choice and the scope of tracking played less of a role, I think, because, with one exception, school leaders were focused on getting as many students into higher level courses as possible.



*Figure 6-8: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding across all interviews* **Conceptual Considerations Summary** 

As outlined above, Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory played an overwhelmingly large role in framework coding with Sorensen's organizational differentiation code in second place (see again Figure 6.3). Opportunity to Learn and Culturally Responsive School Leadership tied for third place while Critical Race Theory was in last place. These placements suggest a need to use CRT to help school leaders, particularly white school leaders, talk more explicitly about the roles race and racism play in detracking programs.

### Limitations

**COVID-19 and data collection.** When this study was first designed, COVID-19 had not yet entered our common lexicon. By the time I began data collection, however, each of the schools in the study had closed due to the pandemic. During the course of qualitative data collection, each state in the study also cancelled year-end tests. These challenges meant that I could not visit the schools in person nor would I have end-of-year data to rely on for the quantitative analysis part of this study. With vaccines arriving to health care workers in the

United States as I write this, I hope that the next round of detracking research involving school principals will happen in person and that we will enjoy robust quantitative data collection once more. The closing of schools is also sure to affect children's learning and may increase desires for tracking to more efficiently catch students up. This desire needs to be carefully studied when it is safe to do so.

**Validity threats.** Within any comparative mixed methods case study, the use of the qualitative and quantitative instrument can still provide an opportunity to leave out important data. By studying more than one school, however, I will be able to find similarities and differences across the study sites in regards to school leaders' behavior.

**Student achievement data.** Questioning assumptions of neutrality is crucial to the use of CRT in educational research, and the neutrality of student achievement data must submit to such questioning. Using Office of Civil Rights data as the main source of quantitative data allowed for additional measures such as advanced course enrollment and graduation rates. The nature of the mixed methods study design allowed me to triangulate the data using a critical lens (Creswell, 2014).

We don't know what we don't know. Researchers currently lack a formal census of schools throughout the United States implementing detracking programs. This lack of knowledge about detracking schools makes it impossible to know what might be a representative sample. The present study attempts to mitigate this concern by working with a national organization made up of detracking and tracking researchers from across the United States.

#### **Concluding Thoughts**

School building leaders are key in undermining within school segregation through detracking programs. Given what we know about the discriminatory nature of tracking programs (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005), principals have the opportunity to shape more equitable student

sorting policies. Understanding how some school leaders have accomplished this feat in detracked schools can help other school administrators follow a similar path. Building on the work of this study to go forward and create a measure with predictive validity can aid in future research that explores the causal mechanisms behind detracking and student achievement relationships that may exist.

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Appendix A: Theoretical Patterns Considered During Data Collection

Adapted from Rossman & Rallis (2017, p. 171)

Principal Decisions and Student Sorting Formal or Informal Sorting Patterns of Principal Decisions and Scope Patterns of Principal Decisions and Electivity Patterns of Principal Decisions and Selectivity Patterns of Principal Decisions and Inclusivity Ways Students Organize Themselves Tacit Rules in Operation in Student Sorting

### Activities and Action

Sequence of Events of Principal Decisions and Student Sorting Time Sampling Rituals of Student Sorting Discussions Unplanned Activities

### Theoretical Considerations

Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Embodied Cultural Capital Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Objectified Cultural Capital Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Institutional Cultural Capital Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Asserted Neutrality Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Colorblindness Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Interest Convergence Patterns of Principal Decisions, Student Sorting, and Racism

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Principals

Understanding the School Context

- 1. When did your school begin the current detracking program?
- 2. Did you work at the school at the time the current detracking began?
  - Probe: If yes, in what capacity?

- Probe: If no, what drew you to work in this detracking program?
- 3. To your knowledge, why did your school decide to begin the current detracking program?
- 4. How do you define detracking?
- 5. How does your school community define detracking?
- Please explain how supportive students' guardians and families have been of detracking.
- 7. Please explain how supportive students have been of detracking.
- Please explain how supportive your assistant administrators have been of detracking.
- 9. Please explain how supportive you are of detracking.

### Considering Electivity, Inclusivity, Selectivity, and Scope

- 10. Among all courses offered at your school, how many courses can result in students earning college credit (AP, dual enrollment, IB, etc.)?
- 11. What requirements must students meet in order to enroll in these courses?
- 12. In the core courses of English, science, math, and social studies, how many levels exist at each grade level?
  - Probe: How are students placed in a particular level?
  - Probe: How does this answer compare to what is presented in the school or division's program of study?

Teacher Support and Instructional Leadership

- 13. Please explain how supportive teachers have been of detracking.
- 14. To what extent do you support teachers in the current detracking program?
  - Probe: How have you supported teachers resistant to detracking?
  - Probe: How have you supported teachers in favor of detracking?

15. To what extent do educators' biases affect the detracking program?

- Probe: What biases toward students, student learning, or how schools should be organized might adults have in your school that could affect the detracking program?
- Probe: In what ways do you attempt to help teachers overcome their biases that might affect the detracking program?
- Probe: In what ways do you attempt to help your assistant administrators overcome their biases that might affect the detracking program?
- Probe: In what ways do you work on overcoming your own biases that might affect the detracking program?
- 16. Please describe your approach to instructional leadership as it relates to the current detracking system.

### School Climate

- 17. How would you describe the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 18. To what extent do your assistant administrators contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?

- Probe: What specific actions do your assistant administrators take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 19. To what extent do you contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
  - Probe: What specific actions do you take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?

## Dismantling Barriers to Student Success

- 20. To what extent do your students experience barriers to success?
  - Probe: What are these barriers?
    - Possible barriers to discuss:
      - Mannerisms or discipline in class (embodied cultural capital)
      - Strong background knowledge (objectified cultural capital)
      - Parental support of education (institutionalized cultural capital)
      - Racism in and out of school (CRT)
      - Test scores (CRT)
      - Community demands on the school at odds with

success for all students (CRT)

- A lack of anti-racist education for faculty members (CRT)
- 21. To what extent do you help students overcome these barriers?
  - Probe: What actions do you take to help students overcome these barriers?

### Revisiting the School Context

- 22. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your assistant administrators' role in it?
- 23. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your role in it?
- 24. What else I should know before we wrap up?

#### Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Assistant Principals

## Understanding the School Context

- 1. When did your school begin the current detracking program?
- 2. Did you work at the school at the time the current detracking began?

- Probe: If yes, in what capacity?
- Probe: If no, what drew you to work in this detracking program?
- 3. To your knowledge, why did your school decide to begin the current detracking program?
- 4. How do you define detracking?
- 5. How does your school community define detracking?
- Please explain how supportive students' guardians and families have been of detracking.
- 7. Please explain how supportive students have been of detracking.
- 8. Please explain how supportive your school leader has been of detracking.
- Please explain how supportive your fellow assistant administrators have been of detracking.
- 10. Please explain how supportive you are of detracking.

## Considering Electivity, Inclusivity, Selectivity, and Scope

- 11. Among all courses offered at your school, how many courses can result in students earning college credit (AP, dual enrollment, IB, etc.)?
- 12. What requirements must students meet in order to enroll in these courses?
- 13. In the core courses of English, science, math, and social studies, how many levels exist at each grade level?
  - Probe: How are students placed in a particular level?
  - Probe: How does this answer compare to what is presented in the school or division's program of study?

### Teacher Support and Instructional Leadership

- 14. Please explain how supportive your faculty colleagues have been of detracking.
- 15. To what extent does your school leader support teachers in the current detracking program?
  - Probe: How has your school leader supported teachers resistant to detracking?
  - Probe: How has your school leader supported teachers in favor of detracking?
- 16. To what extent do your fellow assistant administrators support teachers in the current detracking program?
  - Probe: How have your fellow assistant administrators supported teachers resistant to detracking?
  - Probe: How have your fellow assistant administrators supported teachers in favor of detracking?
- 17. To what extent do you support teachers in the current detracking program?
  - Probe: How have you supported teachers resistant to detracking?
  - Probe: How have you supported teacher in favor of detracking?
- 18. To what extent do you support other members of the school staff besides teachers

in the current detracking program?

- 19. To what extent do educators' biases affect the detracking program?
  - Probe: What biases toward students, student learning, or how schools should be organized might adults have in your school that could affect the detracking program?

- Probe: In what ways do you attempt to help teachers overcome their biases that might affect the detracking program?
- Probe: In what ways do you attempt to help your assistant administrators overcome their biases that might affect the detracking program?
- Probe: In what ways do you work on overcoming your own biases that might affect the detracking program?
- 20. Please describe your approach to instructional leadership as it relates to the current detracking system.

## School Climate

- 21. How would you describe the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 22. To what extent do your assistant administrators contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
  - Probe: What specific actions do your assistant administrators take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 23. To what extent do you contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
  - Probe: What specific actions do you take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?

## Dismantling Barriers to Student Success

24. To what extent do your students experience barriers to success?

- Probe: What are these barriers?
  - Possible barriers to discuss:
    - Mannerisms or discipline in class (embodied cultural
      - capital)
    - Strong background knowledge (objectified cultural capital)
    - Parental support of education (institutionalized cultural capital)
    - Racism in and out of school (CRT)
    - Test scores (CRT)
    - Community demands on the school at odds with success for all students (CRT)
    - A lack of anti-racist education for faculty members

## (CRT)

- 25. To what extent do your fellow assistant administrators help students overcome these barriers?
  - Probe: What actions do your fellow assistant administrators take to help students overcome these barriers?
- 26. To what extent does your school leader help students overcome these barriers?
  - Probe: What actions do your fellow assistant administrators take to help students overcome these barriers?
- 27. To what extent do you help students overcome these barriers?
  - Probe: What actions do you take to help students overcome these barriers?

- 28. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your fellow assistant administrators' role in it?
- 29. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your school leader's role in it?
- 30. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your role in it?
- 31. What else I should know before we wrap up?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Teacher Leaders

Understanding the School Context

- 1. When did your school begin the current detracking program?
- 2. Did you work at the school at the time the current detracking began?
  - Probe: If yes, in what capacity?
  - Probe: If no, what drew you to work in this detracking program?

- 3. To your knowledge, why did your school decide to begin the current detracking program?
- 4. How do you define detracking?
- 5. How does your school community define detracking?
- 6. How does your supervising administrator define detracking?
- 7. How does your school principal define detracking?
- Please explain how supportive students' guardians and families have been of detracking.
- 9. Please explain how supportive students have been of detracking.
- 10. Please explain how supportive you are of detracking.

#### Considering Electivity, Inclusivity, Selectivity, and Scope

- 11. Among all courses offered at your school, how many courses can result in students earning college credit (AP, dual enrollment, IB, etc.)?
- 12. What requirements must students meet in order to enroll in these courses?
- 13. In the courses in your department, how many levels exist at each grade level?
  - Probe: How are students placed in a particular level?
  - Probe: How does this answer compare to what is presented in the school or division's program of study?

### Teacher Support and Instructional Leadership

- 14. Please explain how supportive your faculty colleagues have been of detracking.
- 15. How have you seen your supervising administrator support teachers resistant to detracking?

- 16. How have you seen your school principal support teachers resistant to detracking?
- 17. How have you seen your supervising administrator support teachers in favor of detracking?
- 18. How have you seen your school principal support teachers in favor of detracking?
- 19. To what extent do you support teachers in the current detracking program?
- 20. To what extent do educators' biases affect the detracking program?
  - Probe: In what ways does your supervising administrator attempt to help faculty overcome their biases?
  - Probe: In what ways do you work on overcoming your own biases?

## School Climate

- 21. How would you describe the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 22. To what extent does your supervising administrator contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
  - Probe: What specific actions does your supervising administrator take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
- 23. To what extent does your school leader contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?
  - Probe: What specific actions does your school leader take to contribute to the school climate in terms of the current detracking program?

Dismantling Barriers to Student Success

- 24. To what extent do your students experience barriers to success?
  - Probe: What are these barriers?
    - Possible barriers to discuss:
      - Mannerisms or discipline in class (embodied cultural capital)
      - Strong background knowledge (objectified cultural capital)
      - Parental support of education (institutionalized cultural capital)
      - Racism in and out of school (CRT)
      - Test scores (CRT)
      - Community demands on the school at odds with

success for all students (CRT)

- A lack of anti-racist education for faculty members
  - (CRT)
- 25. To what extent does your supervising administrator help students overcome these barriers?

26. To what extent does your school principal help students overcome these barriers?

Revisiting the School Context

- 27. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your supervising administrator's role in it?
- 28. What else should I know about the detracking program at your school and your school leader's role in it?

29. What else I should know before we wrap up?

Appendix E: Framework Coding Details

## **Framework Coding**

# **Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory**

Cultural reproduction theory suggests that distinctions attributed to dominant groups function as "capital" (Bourdieu, 1987). Those holding a given distinction can then spend that capital within a particular social exchange (Bourdieu, 1987). Social exchanges take place in the context of human interactions where one person gives or receives anything of value to or from another (Bourdieu, 1987). Thus, cultural capital functions to reproduce existing class structures. Understanding how students are sorted into classes through this lens views choices about student recommendations as a social exchange, with placement in high-level courses seen as valuable. Bourdieu's theory helps those seeking to lead schools equitably understand how students' cultural capital works in those exchanges. His work can also help those researching school leaders conceptualize the different exchanges of cultural capital underlying leaders' decisions. Chambers, Huggins, Locke, & Fowler (2014), for example, use Bourdieu to understand how social inequalities are often exacerbated by the tracking decisions made in schools. The authors conclude "schools are complicit in the perpetuation and maintenance of social and economic stratification" (p. 468) through tracking practices.

Bourdieu's work also provides an important critique of other frameworks that suggest schools are designed to overcome inequality. In exploring how one such frame, multiculturalism, may actually help to undermine efforts at expanding educators' understandings of what counts as cultural capital, Olneck (2000), expanding on Bourdieu, observed that formal education functions to re-create dominant structures. Olneck delineates three types of cultural capital at work in classrooms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Olneck's framework makes clear that for school leaders attempting to practice equality through their leadership, understanding the mechanisms of cultural capital is key to undermining the dominance of any one culture in a school. For researchers, understanding this expansion of Bourdieu's work using these three types of cultural capital can help guide the evaluation of student sorting programs–including those that educators claim serve student interests.

**Principal** A

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the least sources of codes. Because student tracking theoretically exists to reproduce existing cultural capital, I was surprised that Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory did not offer many codes during this round. I used only three of the five potential codes (see Figure 1). Social exchange dominated this coding structure but only because both institutionalized cultural capital and cultural capital in general provide one code respectively. In future coding sessions, I want to think more deeply about the utility of this framework and how to put it into practice in my data analysis.



Figure 1: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Principal A interview

### Counselor B

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the second greatest number of framework codes. Unlike other interviewees, Counseling Chair B did not focus as much on detracking issues that might be coded using Cultural Reproduction Theory. In terms of noting social exchanges using cultural capitals, institutionalized cultural capital was notable. As with other frameworks, this cultural capital related largely to the ways in which electives privileged children chose drove the master scheduling of ostensibly detracked classes. "Another driver is the kids who take summer PE and virtual PE because that enables them to have other electives
and does move the master schedule," he noted. "And it also means that our terrestrial PE classes during the day are disproportionately Black and Brown."

Bourdieu			
social exchange	eultural capital	institutionalized cultural capital	objectified
		embodied cultural capital	



Bourdieu's theory made up over half of my framework code. Social exchanges and cultural capital played a sizable role in my framework coding of this English department chair's interview transcript (see Figure 3). Institutionalized cultural capital was most often referenced in terms of parents and other community members organizing against detracking. These citizens' institutionalized cultural capital allows their voices to often play an outsized role in detracking planning and implementation. The chair noted "interestingly enough, the greatest challenge is not from within the building. It's from the community. [The] community as a whole has not been responsive." In fact, according to the department chair, parents of honors students had been able to undo some of the reforms implemented in previous years in favor of retracking "lower" students.

Bourdieu		
social exchange	cultural capital	embodied cuitur
	Inclinitionalized outpurationalitat	
		objectified cult

Figure 3: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from English B interview *APB1* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Assistant Principal B1 and I spoke at length about the social exchanges involved in student sorting. AP B1 had a particularly keen understanding of how students in need of special education services often lacked embodied cultural capital in these exchanges. Students "might have a disability in reading or writing that might impact their ability to access some of the content from a traditional standpoint, but it doesn't mean they can't understand the concepts or we can't scaffold things to make it accessible for them," she said. "Why should they be deprived of that opportunity just because of their disability?"

Bourdieu			
social exchange	euitural eapital	embodied cultural capital	institutionalized cultural c

Figure 4: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from APB1 interview

#### APB2

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory played a role in this round of coding primarily in BAP2's discussions of social exchanges that hinge on institutionalized cultural capital. BAP2 saw institutionalized cultural capital particularly at play in terms of some faculty members' resistance to leveling up. "I do feel like teachers who have traditionally taught only upper level students or only privileged students are resisting and have put up some resistance," he said. He did note that this resistance has been minimal and that there are only four to six teachers actively resistance. Their resistance, however, is quite vocal and has undermined the detracking program.

Bourdieu			
social exchange	institutionalized cultural capital	eultural capital	embodie

Figure 5: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from APB2 interview

#### Instructional Coach B

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Instructional Coach B noted social exchanges primarily driven by institutionalized cultural capital. She particularly saw tracking as rooted in gifted and talented policies in younger grades. "That's how you get to get the gifted education," she said, "by marginalizing and keeping out students of color and students who don't have financial resources to avail themselves and their families, to avail themselves enrichment opportunities. So, I do think that the detracking conversation has to be enrichment, talent development, as well as academic and course path planning."

She was also one of the few participants to discuss embodied cultural capital and how race plays into how students are treated within tracking and detracking paradigms. She noted disparities in advanced course enrollment and staying in those courses based on race and language backgrounds "Particularly in the humanities," she said. "I would not even just say Black and brown students, Latinx and African American. I would also say Southeast Asian students also would be significant minorities, or ESL students would also be significant minorities"

Bourdieu			
social exchange	institutionalized eultural capital	euitural capital	embodied cultural c
	1	1	

Figure 6: Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory treemap from Instructional Coach B interview *Principal B* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Principal B spoke often of the social exchanges inherent in sorting and supporting students. So much of this support in terms of the community came from institutionalized cultural capital and attempts by wealthy, White parents to derail the detracking work. While these attempts were sometimes the typical concerns about "watering down" curriculum, some parents played up how detracking could potentially harm students with less institutionalized cultural capital. "The other side of the coin for stakeholders," Principal B said, is a "more of a sneaky way of saying it as, oh, I'm all about equity. My major concern is, don't you think that type of instruction would just be way too challenging for those students? And I feel they're going to fall further behind. So it's kind of a deceitful way of tackling the same issue, same problem." These parents have yet to achieve their goal, however, and detracking continues at School B.



Figure 7: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Principal B interview

# Math B

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding, making up nearly half of the conceptual codes I used. Much of the discussion with Math Chair B focused on the social exchange of sorting students (see Figure 3). The teacher noted most often how important it was to her to include special education students in the honors-for-all-classes. "Is [special education inclusion] something that I feel like we could take out and still call it unleveled? No," she said. She also noted that while other departments had taken a similar path, the English department had not. "My biggest thing with English," she said "is that it's not unleveled, because they still have collab. So, I don't really understand how it's unleveled, because they pull out all the low kids and put them in collab English classes."



Figure 8: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Math B interview *Science B* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Cultural capital, particularly institutionalized cultural capital, played a sizable role in my framework coding of this science chair's interview transcript (see Figure 3). Reading in English at a proscribed level functioned as a type of institutionalized cultural capital as the teacher described her department's detracking work. This situation was especially true for students classed as English Language learners. "The reading is the only hiccup that we have found that's hindering some students," the teacher noted. "But we're doing well. We're getting by that." She explained multiple social exchanges that took place to help these students who lacked institutional cultural capital, particularly with the school's reading specialist and ELL teachers. Because this is the first year of the program, I cannot examine how perceptions of students' reading might impact their future course taking.



Figure 9: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Science B interview *Social Studies B* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of framework coding. Much of the discussion with Social Studies Chair B focused on the social exchange of sorting students into classes (see Figure 3). The teacher noted a lack of common definition about what honors meant at the school, both before and after the transition to honors-for-all courses. "Because it's school change, it's school reform, which are all real long-term changes in terms of rethinking curriculum, rethinking teacher attitudes, looking at data about where students are in any one place for starting and identifying what the purpose is," the chair said. "Because even this conversation of all students should have access to honors level curriculum, as a school, we still haven't defined what that means. I don't know what that is."



Figure 10: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory from Social Studies B

# Principal C

In terms of framework coding, Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory was a close second in providing codes. Much of our discussion related to Cultural Reproduction Theory centered on Principal C's concern about "gatekeeping" mentalities amongst teachers when it comes to recommending students for courses. I classed these concerns and recommendations as social exchanges because recommendations do seem to be a type of cultural capital students receive based on how well they "play school" (**CITATION**). "My philosophy is to allow a kid to move up levels," Principal C said. " When we give presentations of course selection and I make presentations to students, I really challenge the students to just try to challenge themselves in at least one class."

Principal C also shared a frustration with teachers from the middle school not recommending enough students for honors-level ninth grade English. The high school leadership team worked with the middle school to resolve this situation and encourage more students to take the highest level possible in ninth grade English (which is Accelerated Honors since there is no Advanced Placement option). "Some of the data that we shared with our eighth grade English teachers [led to] vertical articulation with all of our core content," Principal C said. "I think it was well-received, and I was very pleased to see that the number of course recommendations for this past year for English 9, Accelerated Honors, was over 100. We're where we need to be."



Figure 11: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Principal C interview *English D* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Perhaps because of the nature of detracking at School D, English Chair B had a firm handle on describing the social exchanges inherent in student sorting systems. He spoke at length about recent changes from the IB-for-All model to a co-seated IB and Regents English course. "I know the special ed PTA is upset when it is pushed on students, that some of them feel their children ought not be doing this sort of program," the teacher said. "And then it comes from the other end where perhaps some parents feel as if their students' experiences are compromised by an overly zealous push to include everyone."

English Chair D also saw students' institutionalized and embodied cultural capital often playing a role in these social exchanges. "I would say that there has been some disruption to that unifying sense because of that [switch to co-seating], so that it doesn't come up often, but it's there. The students are acutely aware of who's in which course. As I also, I think, indicated, there is, I would suggest, a correlation with socioeconomics, and ethnicity, and skin color. That's fairly obvious. Not completely, but it's there."

Bourdieu	
social exchange	Institutionalized cultural capital
eultural capital	embodied cultural capital

Figure 12: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from English D interview

# **AP D1**

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding. When viewed through the lens of Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory, School D AP1 spoke primarily about the social exchanges inherent both in education in general and detracking in particular. She was particularly adamant about how others should not be making choices for students as to their future endeavors: "I don't personally believe that anyone should make that judgment on what they're capable of, because they're capable of more than we think usually," she said. "Expectation makes a difference too. So, I am a full believer in that all kids just deserve to have the access to the same information." In terms of cultural capital at work in social exchanges, School D AP1 mostly pointed out varying types of institutionalized cultural capital–especially the institutionalized cultural capital of parents who are able to advocate loudly for their children

but she noted she thinks "the majority of parents and students, obviously the majority really do feel that it's worthwhile." Thus, the program can continue.

Bourdieu	urdieu		
social exchange	cultural capital	institutionalized cultural capital	
		embodied cultural capital	

Figure 13: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from AP D1 interview

# **AP D2**

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding. This theory alone made up not quite half of the conceptual codes I used. Much of School D AP2's understanding of detracking with in a cultural reproduction framework was colored by his previous experience at a highly-tracked school. "The biggest differences that I've seen, and it really gets down to culture really," he said "but you started to just label students or classes by their level. So you would hear things in my previous school, 'I'm teaching an extended class or he or she's a lab kid." DAP2 noted that these sorts of distinction do not happen at School D because of the detracking program. All students increase their social capital through the IB-forall model, although some institutionalized cultural capital through parental agitation still exists. "I do get the occasional parent that wants their child to be pushed a little bit more," he said. "but those are just more general conversations that happen between administrator, teacher, parent and those kind of things about different certain classroom issues."



Figure 14: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from AP D2 interview *AP D3* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding. DAP3 described a number of social exchanges that factor into the detracking program at School D along with the cultural capital that goes along with these exchanges. As the head of special education instruction, he spoke at length about the school's work to get the options for students with special needs right. In addition to a life skills program for students with extreme disabilities, he told me about a new program that was all-Regents, essentially opting students out of the IBfor-all program. This Pathways Program actually came about, according to DAP3, after parents of students with special needs exercised their institutionalized cultural capital.

"We were trying to advance the IB program to make it IB for all in the 11th and 12th grade and in English, but we got a lot of pushback from the special education community about that, from the parents," he explained. "They didn't want that, and we wound up actually making a separate program for some kids called The Pathways Program, so that they would not even be in the inclusion model. It's kind of a little bit more restrictive, and that is somewhat self-contained, which we really don't have here, but they wanted a self-contained program for those kids and they won't be taking anything IB."

Bourdieu			
social exchange	eultural eapital	institutionalized cultural capital	<u>ob</u>
			-
		embodied cultural capital	

Figure 15: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from AP D3 interview

# AP D4

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Much of my discussion with DAP4 regarding cultural reproduction theory focused on the ways in which School D has reoriented what it means to have institutionalized cultural capital. Unlike at some schools, all students are invited into the advanced program. "I visit all 10th graders in say December to introduce them to the possibility" of IB, she said, "And I emphasize that we want anyone and everyone to participate. Whether you take one course, whether you do the full IB diploma, so I'm kind of putting it out there for everyone. I'm not depending on guidance counselors to pick and choose or to get the message out." Because she is the IB coordinator for the school, DAP4's belief that every child can succeed in the IB program goes a long way toward helping all students at the school access the cultural capital of an advanced diploma with college credit.

Bourdieu		
social exchange	cultural capital	institutionalized cultural capital
		embodied cultural capital

Figure 16: Treemap of cultural reproduction theory coding from AP D4 interview

#### Principal D

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding. Much of the discussion with Principal D centered on how students' cultural capital can impact their opportunities and how the detracking program at the school is designed to combat this discrimination (see Figure 3). "We're living in a generation where actually I would argue that the issue is that it's not that the system isn't successful, it's that the system has been too successful," he noted. He also noted that even within the detracking program, students from socioeconomically oppressed background and those learning English are still often at a disadvantage because of their lack of institutionalized cultural capital. "So there are language barriers, the barriers that come with economic hardship, being alone at home, requiring more independence, the possibility that you may be not in an educationally rich household, emotional needs, whether it's anxiety, fear," he said. "Offering tutoring and extra help is great, but that's assuming that you're not babysitting right after school with kids. That's a barrier, finding the times and places for those students to avail of any extra resources that we have."



Figure 17: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Principal D interview

#### Math D

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction provided the dominant source of coding. Math Chair D described many social exchanges within the detracking program at School D. These social exchanges were based primarily on institutionalized cultural capital. What is interesting, however, is that the school seems to have devised a way to make attendance at the school itself a marker of institutionalized cultural capital. "It's just the way it is," Math Chair D said over and over again about the high expectations and advanced courses offered to most students. Students are still steered in certain directions, she noted, but even those directions are largely advanced. "I think math people are probably more guilty than others as far as steering kids in places," the chair said. "But I think most teachers approach it from what are you thinking of? So when they go from sophomore to junior year, they have two IB choices: one is a more difficult class and one is not. So a teacher will have a discussion with the kid or the student with the teacher when they're not sure."

Bourdieu			
social exchange	institutionalized cultural capital	cultural capital	embodied cultural c

Figure 18: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Math D interview *Science D* 

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Cultural Reproduction Theory played a role in my framework coding particularly in the ways in which detracking has become institutionalized cultural capital for the children who attend School D. The school leadership team is particularly involved "just in terms of supporting the kids in terms of introducing them to the program, guiding them through the extended essay, which is one of the big projects that they do, and to try to ease fears," Science Chair D said. "In addition, they actually have parent institutes, which everything's been done virtually. So that's one of the aspects that the school leadership does get involved in."



Figure 19: Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory treemap from Science D interview

# Social Studies D

Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory provided the dominant source of coding. Despite having taught at School D since before the transition to detracking, Social Studies Chair D still had many reservations about the program that played out in the way she discussed both the social exchanges inherent to student tracking and students' cultural capital. Social Studies Chair D particularly seemed to think that parents of special education students exerted a lot of influence over the diminishing of the detracking program and that they were well -guided in their concerns. According to her IB for All "became such a problem that within our community primarily special education, parents of kids who got special ed services, but also parents of kids who didn't necessarily want their kids funneled into IB they revolted years ago and pushed back against that detracking because they saw that detracking as actually a track, a very inflexible track," she said. She saw parents felt "that their kids didn't have choices and they weren't really supported."

Bourdieu	lourdieu		
social exchange	cultural capital	institutionalized cultural capital	embodied cultural c
			objectified cultural c

Figure 20: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from Social Studies D interview *Summary* 

The Cultural Reproduction Theory codes provided the dominant sources of coding in 17 out of 20 of the qualitative interviews. Interviewees described many social exchanges within their detracking programs. The type of social capital used most frequently in these exchanges was institutionalized cultural capital. In some instances, particularly in School D, going to a school with a detracking program has become the institutionalized cultural capital. In other schools, particularly School B, institutionalized cultural capital existed in terms of having parents to whom the school is most responsive. Also notable at School B, the master schedule functioned as a form of cultural capital in terms of orchestra, band, and math driving how students are placed in classes, even ones that are ostensibly detracked.



Figure 21: Treemap of Cultural Reproduction Theory coding from all interviews.

# Culturally Responsive School Leadership

With the structural and institution bases of cultural reproduction theory and critical race theory, culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) combines many conceptual understandings of serving students who are minoritized due to their lack of cultural capital (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016) along with enhancing specific practices leaders can take to improve student learning (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). CRSL provides a way to discuss these practices in a larger framework that values minoritized students while considering the institutional barriers that can harm minoritized students. Principals practicing CRSL work on overcoming their own biases while assisting their teachers in doing so as well, identifying and dismantling barriers to student success, and enacting culturally responsive instructional leadership. Understanding CRSL as a lens for research can provide source material for the proposed survey construction along with valuable tools for analyzing the qualitative data that will help drive the survey creation.

#### **Principal** A

Critical Race Theory and Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided nearly equal sources, tying for third place among the framework codes used. Surprisingly to me, Culturally Responsive School Leadership played less of a role in the framework coding of Principal A's interview. Of the tenants of CRSL, culturally responsive instructional leadership occurred the most (see Figure 6). Throughout the interview, Principal A stressed the importance of identifying, communicating, and holding fast to values about the type of schooling all children deserve. Principal A communicated these values through instructional leadership actions such as guiding the English department in created standards-based grading. He also noted guiding teachers away from a "system where things like homework become an equity issue because you're now rewarding privilege more than you're rewarding achievement or mastery."

Identifying barriers to minoritized students' success combined with educators overcoming biases also provided substantive codes. Dismantling those barriers, however, provided the least number of codes and revealed a place where the school leadership could continue to improve.



Figure 1: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Principal A interview *Counselor B* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the fourth most codes. Whereas other interviews focused a great deal on Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Counseling Chair B did less so. This makes sense when one considered that he is not a classroom teacher. From his vantage point, however, he did note several ways in which school leaders at School B were working particularly to identify barriers to minoritized students' success. He noted particularly the ways in which teaching is still the crux of the detracking work at School B. "But I really think that ultimately the teacher is still in a position where they have to differentiate in order to make the class accessible to every kid," he said.



Figure 2: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Counselor B interview *English Chair B* 

Similar to the other interviews I had so far conducted, Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) played a smaller role than I had anticipated in my framework coding. Of the tenants of CRSL, identifying barriers to minoritized students' success came up the most (see Figure 6). The department chair saw the biggest barrier as "the system" being set up against kids who struggle, for whatever reason. Surprisingly to me, she did not have specific aspects of the system she could identify in terms of erecting these barriers. In terms of dismantling barriers, she saw galvanizing community support, decreasing homework expectations, and the standardized test scheme discussed above as the most important.

Identifying barriers to minoritized students' suc	Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' suc	Culturally responsive instructio	Educators o

Figure 3: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in English B interview *AP B1* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the second greatest number of framework codes. AP B1 both exhibited culturally responsive school leadership on her own and outlined ways Principal B practices CRSL, too. Their main CRSL work has been in identifying and dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success. AP B1 spoked about this in particular when discussing student behavior and race: "If you're looking at data, the only reason that I could think is because their skin color and their behavior. I mean, what else? Why? Then you have students in honors that have lower math scores and maybe some lower other scores that are in honors. It's just not consistent. I think they think, oh well they're a behavior problem so they shouldn't be in honors, which is crap."

CRSL	L		
CRSL Identifying barriers to minoritized students' success	Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success	Culturally responsive instructional leadership	
		Educators overcoming blases	

Figure 4: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in APB1 interview *AP B2* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership was in third place in terms of framework coding AP B2's interview. BAP2 held his school's principal in high regard in terms of supporting leveling up through culturally responsive school leadership. "I think he's done everything a person could possibly do," BAP2 said about his principal. He outlined work at school board meetings defending and promoting the program, inviting speakers to share their experiences in detracked schools and classrooms, and book studies designed to help teachers improve differentiation within their leveled up classes. BAP2 also described the administrative team's work on leveling up as fundamentally a practice of identifying and dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success. "Since this particular administrative team has been here since 2016," he said, "I think that a lot of efforts have went into tearing some of those barriers down with their whole level up concept and making sure that more students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic status have access to more of our classes and even some of our honors classes."



Figure 5: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in APB2 interview *Instructional Coach B* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the second greatest number of framework codes. Instructional Coach B noted many barriers to minoritized students' success at School B. She particularly thought teachers need more support working with students from diverse backgrounds. "One of the first things I think is one of the low level access points is really just to help teachers do noticing," she said. "Teachers, it's just hard for a teacher to observe real time their practices, how they're interacting with students, and how those interactions are fostering and facilitating learning and growth, and then how they stifle it and shut it down."

She did, however, see the detracking program as one significant way to dismantle those barriers, if done properly and using metrics that matter. She advocated for "looking at developing curricula and lessons that are very well differentiated, scaffolded as needed, so that all students have an entry point and all students have rigorous and relevant learning experiences," she said.

basi			
Identifying barriers to minoritized students' success	Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success	Educators overc	Culturally res

Figure 6: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Instructional Coach B interview

### Principal B

Roughly a quarter of the codes related to Culturally Responsive School Leadership in this interview. Principal B does seem to be providing a positive example of culturally responsive school leadership. Much of his development of the detracking program has focused on helping teachers embrace culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. This support has manifested, according to him, both through working with faculty members to identify barriers to minoritized student success and through culturally responsive instructional leadership. "Our school has really tried to embrace the culture of responsive movement and best practices," Principal B said, "which are just best practices in general. But really engaging students and making learning relevant to them, making learning relevant to certain subgroups that we ignore: students that come from urban settings, traditionally Black and Brown students that are low-income."



Figure 7: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Principal B interview *Math B* 

For Math B's interview, CRSL provided the second-to-last number of framework codes. The most dominant tenant of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in my conversation with Math Chair B was culturally responsive school leadership. She spoke a great deal about her own instructional leadership within her department, including intentionally choosing and supporting teachers of the detracked classes. She also described several instructional leadership actions on the part of Principal B. "He was very supportive on anything we needed," she said. He provided "us with any resources we needed. As soon as we asked, he would find a way to get it for us. He got us some books we asked for, we wanted to read. He gave us planning days in the classroom. Or, planning days in the school year to work."

Math Chair B also highlighted the work of the three instructional coaches at the school in terms of supporting detracking. She noted that relative to the supervising assistant principal, instructional coaches were "more involved" with the math PLCs. Discussion of barriers and biases related largely to special education students as discussed above.



Figure 8: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Math B interview **Science B** 

Similar to the first interview I conducted, Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) played a smaller role than I had anticipated in my framework coding, providing the second fewest codes. Of the tenants of CRSL, culturally responsive instructional leadership came up the most (see Figure 6). This instructional leadership came from the department chair as she attended weekly biology PLCs and worked to secure funding for requested programs for biology honors. She also spoke to the culturally responsive instructional leadership of the school's principal, who is also her department's supervising administrator. She noted his work within the school's leadership team to develop common purpose and language around the school's detracking program.

CRSL		
Culturally responsive instructional leadership	Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success	Identifying barriers
		Educators overcom

Figure 6: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership codes in Science B interview *Social Studies B* 

Tied with Bourdieu, Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the dominant source of coding in this interview. CRSL played a large role during the framework coding with three equal codes: identifying barriers to minoritized student success, culturally responsive instructional leadership, and dismantling barriers to student success (see Figure 4). Social Studies Chair B viewed some of these barriers not from a culturally responsive lens but from one of deficit. When asked about barriers, he noted confidence, peer groups, and skill gaps. He did note, however, high expectations with appropriate supports as the work he has undertaken to dismantle barriers. As a department chair, he also spoke at length about his responsibility to be a culturally responsive instructional leader and aid other teachers in understanding how best to implement honors-for-all while challenging other school leaders to offer clear definitions.



Figure 7: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Social Studies B interview

#### **Principal** C

Culturally Responsive School Leadership played the smallest role in framework coding this interview. As is likely to be in a school where a principal does not openly discuss racial issues, culturally responsive school leadership did not play a large role in my coding work during this round. Principal C did, however, recognize the tendency of some teachers to act as gatekeepers to higher-level courses. He outlined ways he had worked to engage a more opendoor philosophy, and I saw this action as, at least somewhat, as an example of educators overcoming biases. "Culture and climate has everything to do with this," Principal C said. "If you have teachers or administrators that are gatekeepers, it's very difficult to overcome that."

Principal C noted that teachers' attitudes toward course recommendations have taken time to change. "You need to really get people on board to do that," he noted. "Having our motto is, we want all students to strive to achieve their personal best. That's really important to really believe that. If you're gatekeeping, it's really difficult to have all kids strive to achieve their personal best."



Figure 8: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Principal C interview *English D* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership was also second-to-last in terms of framework codes in this interview. English Chair D articulated several barriers to minoritized student success in terms of students' class assignments. He noted that tracking is a very inefficient system that often makes incorrect placements of students. "I've been in schools that are highly tracked, and I feel as if it's almost always informed by the wrong stuff," he said. "Whether it's whiny parents, or compliance, or enormous effort, I don't think those are great indicators for tracking. I do feel as if students are better off having access to the whole program and doing as well as they can. There is a price to be paid for that, but I think it's worth it." He felt the price as having to go more slowly in course pacing but both he and Principal D noted that a slower pace might be good for all students who have expressed "workload duress" as they are pushed to succeed.

CRSL			
	Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' suc	Culturally responsive instructional feadership	Identifying barriers to minorik
			Educators overcoming biases

Figure 9: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in English D interview *AP D1* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided nearly the same amount of codes as Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation, and these two frameworks tied for third place in terms of the number of codes applied. School D AP1 clearly valued Principal D for his enactment of culturally responsive school leadership practices. She noted the ways in which he worked both to identify barriers to minoritized student's success both within and outside of school. She also noted how he worked to dismantle those barriers through tutoring at school and with community partners. According to her he "is very involved with students in the building. He has advisory committees with all different levels of students so that they can share with him their concerns and their struggles."

According to School D AP1, Principal D also functions as a strong culturally responsive instructional leader. He works with faculty to help them make their classrooms more welcoming for all students through curriculum design and support throughout the school year. "He will offer any kind of supports that the teachers may need," she said. "He really does whatever he can to help alleviate any problems that may arise."



Figure 10: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in AP D1 interview *AP D2* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the second most codes in this interview. Like others interviewed at School D, DAP2 noted the many CRSL practices of Principal D along with other practices the leadership team enacted as a whole. One practice in particular stood out: rebalancing. According to DAP2, every summer, the leadership team works to ensure that the courses are balanced among students with historically high, low, and medium test scores. This process, according to DAP2, ensures "no one particular class is just by happen chance, filled with some of the lowest performing students in the building, so that it's distributed."



Figure 11: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in AP D2 interview *AP D3* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the second most codes in this interview's framework coding. Like others interviewed at School D, DAP2 noted the many CRSL practices of Principal D along with other practices the leadership team enacted as a whole. The idea of "rebalancing" classes again came to the fore. "In terms of detracking, what we do is we look at our master schedule and we review it as an administration," he said. "We actually manipulate the schedule, we go into every section of the main core subjects, and we make sure that each section has a balanced number of high level and low level students, along with your middle ground ability grouping." DAP3 saw this practice as both identifying and dismantling barriers to student success because a class too heavy with one type of student would not be truly detracked.

DAP3 also noted Principal D's work with teachers who might struggle. with differentiation. DAP3 noted that every year has a theme related to detracking based on needs Principal D identifies in the school. "The PD here is meaningful," he said and "very, very important" to supporting teachers within the detracking program.



Figure 12: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in AP D3 interview *AP D4* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provide the second most framework codes in this interview. In addition to her own work, DAP4 noted how strongly the principal embodies the role of a culturally responsive school leadership, particularly in terms of culturally responsive instructional leadership. "He's the principal," she said, "but he is a teacher. He is absolutely an instructional coach. He loves it. He eats it up." She noted lesson studies, curriculum writing, and observation protocols in particular as actions that lead to culturally responsive school leadership at School D.



Figure 13: Treemap of culturally responsive school leadership coding in AP D4 interview *Principal D* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Opportunity to Learn provided the exact same amount of codes and tied for third place in the framework coding. Principal D's function as a culturally responsive school leader seems most evidence in his culturally responsive instructional leadership with teachers (see Figure 5). He noted the need to make sure Black students are not expected to speak for all Black people, particularly in majority white classes. "We've had some meaningful, difficult conversations in recent weeks about what it means to be a black student at South Side High School, which is for the most part an affluent district," Principal D said. "It's hard to be black South Side. It always has been. But that's not just a curriculum issue, that's a broader community issue as well. And what does it feel like to be one of two black students in a class when you're doing To Kill a Mockingbird, or Their Eyes Were Watching God, and how do you do that?"

Principal D has also enacted culturally responsive instructional leadership through several concrete practices. Co-planning curriculum and doing lesson studies to make sure all students can access and are challenged by the material has become part of the school culture as have differentiation and assessment models specifically designed to support all students with their

respective needs. "I think culturally responsive instruction is one of the many key components of how we're moving forward," Principal D said. "And what does a culturally responsive curriculum look like? How do you celebrate diverse voices and how do all students benefit from that? What are the factors in a curricula that could be discriminatory unbeknownst to the practitioners?"



Figure 12: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Principal D interview *Math D* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership for organizational differentiation provided the fourth most conceptual codes. Different from other interviewees at her school, Math Chair D did not have has as much to say about culturally responsive school leadership. When she did, she focused on culturally responsive instructional leadership in the form of her principal. "He has a heart bigger than the state of New York," she said." He will do anything to help a kid. No matter what is busy in his life, he will stop and help." This ethos of supporting students instructionally has carried over throughout the faculty, according to Math Chair D.



Figure 13: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Math D interview *Science D* 

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the fourth number of framework codes. Similar to other educators at this school, Science Chair D outlined many culturally responsive school leadership actions taken specifically by Principal D. "He's pretty much the driving force," Science Chair D said. "I know he inherited it as he came here as a teacher. He was an English teacher before. Well, before I got here. And then when I got here, he was the assistant principal and also the IB coordinator. And I've seen him and worked with him as he's transitioned to the building leader. But yeah, he's 100% into it."

CRSL		
Identifying barriers to minoritized students' success	Culturally responsive instructional leadership	
Dismantling barriers to minoritized students' success	Educators overcoming blases	

Figure 14: Culturally Responsive School Leadership treemap in Science D interview

### Social Studies D

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided the third most codes for the framework coding of this interview. Despite often clashing with the school principal and leadership team on detracking, Social Studies Chair D outlined several culturally responsive school leadership behaviors she saw at the school. Culturally responsive instructional leadership seemed to play an large role for her and for other faculty members in administering the detracking program to their students. "Across the building I think he looks at detracking as a way to address opportunity gaps and achievement gaps and as a form of a more just educational system," she said. "In looking at our student body, I think over the last 10 or 15 years there's been an attempt to try and create more equity for students within the district. Detracking is a way to do that by taking students to put them in a least restrictive environment, so for them detracking is to create the least restrictive educational environment, and they do so by providing as much support as is possible."


Figure 15: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding in Social Studies D interview

# Summary

Culturally Responsive School Leadership played less of a role in framework coding than I had initially anticipated. Interviewees mainly highlighted the ways in which their administrators both identified and dismantled barriers to student success. Most interviewees saw the previous tracking systems as barriers to student success due to their discriminatory nature. Some interviewees also spoke about outside factors and how school leaders helped students to address those factors.



Figure 16: Treemap of Culturally Responsive School Leadership coding across all interviews Critical Race Theory

As discussed at length in Chapter 2, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines and criticizes how race and racism function in social systems (Delgado et al., 2017). Four CRT themes are particularly important to the study of school leadership for tracking and detracking and add to Bourdieu's work discussed above: 1) the permanence of racism in life in the U.S., 2) skepticism regarding assertions of neutrality, 3) the assertion that nothing changes related to race unless it also serves white interests (interest convergence), and 4) the challenging of analyses of educational practices that do not take race into account (Ladson-Billings, 1998). These themes provide an additional theoretical rationale for the study of leadership in regards to tracking and detracking. These themes also provided source material for the coding of qualitative data and an additional set of assumptions to consider and test in developing assertations about how school leaders devise student sorting programs.

### Principal A

Critical Race Theory provided the third greatest number of framework codes, tied with Culturally Responsive School Leadership. At School A, the CRT tenant most at work in my coding was cultivating a skepticism of neutrality (see Figure 5). Principal A seemed to hold a dim view of district placement procedures and questioned their utility in terms of helping student learning. He also rejected a district plan for matching subgroup numbers in IB classes and instead focused on "unpack[ing] the system and really say, what do we value? How do we action or how do we put those values into action, operationalize those values?"

Interest convergence also seemed to play a role in how Principal A went about supporting and expanding detracking efforts throughout the school. The IB program was first implemented to lure wealthy, White families to the school, and there was a perceived need to cater to their interests. Principal A noted that so long as everyone kept their honors classes, then these parents were happy with the new system.

Both erasing race and understanding the permeance of racism played a smaller role in understanding both detracking and the principal's actions at School A. Calling out and working through explicit racism seemed difficult for Principal A. He focused on the fact that everyone holds biases and also stated "We didn't get to where we were in the American education system because people were overtly racist or overtly looking to discriminate against kids. We got there because people have, I think, incorrect assumptions, people jump to conclusions about what kids can and can't do based on a very limited range of experiences and people fall back on traditional practices that go back, that predate 19th century practices in some cases."



Figure 17: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Principal A interview

### Counselor B

Critical Race Theory provided the least number of codes. Similar to other discussions with white educators, Critical Race Theory played a very little role in the discussion with Counseling Chair B. He did, however, note his own skepticism of neutrality in terms of the detracking program and how the master schedule continued to affect minoritized students. He noted the ways in which these choices begin playing out before high school. "I think that efforts have been made in the younger ages to enable kids who might not be able to afford a tuba to have a tuba, for example. But by the time they get to high school, if they haven't played an orchestra instrument, then they can't join the orchestra." That inability to play in the orchestra then affects a student's place in the master schedule.



Figure 18: Treemap of Critical Race Theory in Counselor B interview

### English B

During the course of this conversation, however, the tenants of CRT were not made particularly explicit and CRT came in last place again in terms of the number of codes provided. The tenant most prevalent in my coding was erasing race (see Figure 7). This coding was mostly my reading erasure of race into the conversation I had with the department chair, much as her counterpart in the science department. Race was never explicitly mentioned and was erased during conversations about reading, parent interactions, and how previous tracking had affected students. The skepticism of neutrality was also my own when the teacher noted "my classes are racially diverse. I've got as many white kids as I do African American kids. And I would say probably a quarter of my kids are first generation, if not first generation, ESL. And through the community building I had seen them open up to talking to kids of different backgrounds. So it's too early for me to say how kids are responding to it. I think kids will respond to how we do in the long run."



Figure 19: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in English B interview

# AP B1

Critical Race Theory, per usual, provided the least number of codes. Assistant Principal B1 was the first white person I interviewed at School B who explicitly discussed race and racism during the interview. She gave several examples of racist thinking that students faced, including pushback from white parents who did not want to see honors classes opened up to include everyone. She noted with frustration that white parents "advocate for diversity and all of this stuff until you want to put that kid with my kid" but she also explained that Principal B did an excellent job of communicating with those parents to assure them the move to honors for all was best for every student.

She also noted how some parents had trepidations about their students being placed into honors classes for the first time. "I think it's ingrained in some way, and that's the message they're maybe not directly being communicated, but that's how, based on their experiences, they've been tracked forever." This discussion speaks both to the permanence of racism and a skepticism of neutrality that many parents of color seem to feel.



Figure 20: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP B1 interview

# AP B2

Critical Race Theory and Opportunity to Learn tied for fourth place. Interestingly, Critical Race Theory did not come in dead last place in terms of framework coding of BAP2's interview. I can't help but wonder if that is because he is a Black man. Although BAP2 did not talk about his racial identity explicitly, he did offer a great deal of skepticism of neutrality in terms of the detracking program. He particularly noted the benefits that accrue to wealthy, white students transferring in from private schools into the School B. "Students from private schools, or students who come in with a very inflated GPA, and then a student who has just, let's say, been in the public school ranks and then comes in with a 0.0 GPA, theoretically, even if both of those students were to get straight A's throughout, take the same classes and they get straight A's throughout their high school career, one student would never catch the other student because where they were starting from is different," he said.

CRT		
skepileism of neutrality	permanence of racism	interest convergence

Figure 21: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP B2 interview

### Instructional Coach B

Critical Race Theory, unusually, did not come in last place but rather was in fourth place. Perhaps because she is a Black woman, Instructional Coach B seemed much more attuned to issues of race and racism apparent in School B's detracking program. She particularly expressed a skepticism of neutrality in the detracking program when she prodded issues of student enrollment in advanced courses. She again hammered a need to monitor not just demographics of student enrollment but how students are doing in those advanced classes. This monitoring, however, must use nuance, according to Coach B. "We already know that comparing an APlevel C to a regular classroom, standard level classroom C are vastly different," she said, "and that student I argue is far better off, even if they made a two on an AP exam and had a C out of the class, they are far better prepared for the rigor that lies ahead for post-secondary education than a student who did not have that opportunity."

CRT		
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism	interest con

Figure 22: Critical Race Theory treemap in Instructional Coach B interview

# Principal B

Critical Race Theory was also in fourth place in this interview. As a Latino and a Black man, Principal B seems particularly invested in positive outcomes for students of color. Throughout our conversation, he identified many instances of the permanence of racism throughout schooling. "I've always challenged educators, stakeholders to say, what do you mean by those kids?" Principal B said. "Do we mean Brown, Black and special education students? Just because a student has an IEP doesn't mean that they can't do honors work either. It just means they have a disability in reading math or in another area that we have to help them address, overcome, adapt."

CRT		
permanence of racism	skepticism of neutrality	ansing neo
	Interest servergence	

Figure 23: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Principal B interview

### Math B

As in previous interviews with white educators, race was not an explicit part of our discussion, and Critical Race Theory was in last place in terms of the number of framework codes I used. I coded skepticism of neutrality throughout a lot of the discussion regarding early elementary mathematics tracking. I am curious to see what the racial demographic data from the district reveals here. I also noted places in which race was erased all together such as when Math Chair B noted a particular barrier to success for students "is just not buying into school in general, and having that kind of mentality for a long time." She did not elaborate on how students' experiences with racism may have played into their not buying into school.

CRI		
skepticism of neutrality	erasing race	permanence of racism

Figure 24: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Math B interview.

### Science B

During the course of this conversation, however, the tenets of CRT were not made particularly explicit, and thus, CRT was again in last place in terms of framework codes used. The tenet most prevalent in my coding was erasing race (see Figure 7). This coding was mostly my reading erasure of race into the conversation I had with the department chair. Race was never explicitly mentioned and was erased during conversations about reading, parent interactions, and how previous tracking had affected students.

Figure 25: Treemap of Critical Race Theory codes in Science B interview

# Social Studies B

Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. As with several other school leaders, race explicitly never came up during our discussion. I am not sure if this is because the teacher is White or because race can still feel like a "taboo" topic for some. The codes I noted of erasing race and skepticism of neutrality were places where I noticed race was being erased and where I expressed a skepticism of neutrality. They never came up explicitly from Social Studies Chair B. I noticed these concerns in the discussions of special education students most

especially, particularly given that students of color make up 55% of the school's enrollment but 77% of the students with IEPs (Office of Civil Rights, 2015).

CRT	
erasing race	skepticism of neutrality

Figure 26: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Social Studies B interview

### **Principal** C

School C is one of the more racially homogeneous schools in my study. Nearly 80% of students are White. I would assume race played a factor in how the other 20% of students experienced tracking at the school. When I questioned Principal C about their experience, however, he seemed to think this was a non-issue. Thus, the most coded piece of the CRT framework was erasing race.

At no point did Principal C bring up race as a concern in the student sorting process. When asked about the phenomenon of students being under-recommended from the middle school for ninth grade English, he was adamant race had not played a role. "We looked at that data, but I didn't see that it had anything to do with race, no" he said. "It was just across the board." I would like to see this data as I continue my study.



Figure 27: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Principal C interview

### English D

Critical Race Theory provided the least number of framework codes. Similar to other white participants, English Chair D rarely mentioned race or racism in our discussion. He did note that students of color were more likely to be in the Regents section of a humanities course and face some barriers outside of school. He was more likely, however, to erase race and discuss the barriers that economically oppressed students face. "The coordinator who is in charge of registering students, I think, has been particularly encouraging to students who might not otherwise feel encouraged," he said. "So I think there are anecdotal ways in which that's done. I don't that there's anything policy-wise or deliberately done in a systematic way." At no point did English Chair D discuss the unique racism facing Black and Brown students.

CRT		
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism	erasing race
		Interest convergence

Figure 28: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in English D interview

# **AP D1**

Similar to other framework coding experiences during this project, Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. As in other interviews, race was not an explicit topic for much of my discussion with School D AP1. Most of the codes arose from my own skepticism of neutrality or places where I felt race was being erased as a potential factor in a student's experience. School D AP1 struggled to talk about race. In one exchange she tried but then asked that I not quote what she said because she was not comfortable with it. I was not even clear on what she was trying to express.

CRT		
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism	erasing race

Figure 29: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP D1 interview

# **AP D2**

Similar to other framework coding experiences during this project, Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. As in other interviews, race was not an explicit topic for much of my discussion with School D AP2. Most of the codes arose from my own skepticism of neutrality or places where I felt race was being erased as a potential factor in a student's experience. Skepticism of neutrality was particularly relevant as DAP2 discussed the potential for recent Black Lives Matter marches to affect detracking. While I can't say that the Black Lives Matter has come up directly in terms of specific comments or issues firsthand, I think on a secondary and tertiary level, I think our detracking model really falls right in line with making sure that all students, particularly students of color, feel supported in our building because we have expectations for them and they are going to have every opportunity to take every course that we would give any of our students," he said.



Figure 30: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP D2 interview *AP D3* 

Similar to other framework coding experiences during this project, Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. As in most other conversations, race and racism did not play much of an explicit role in my interview with DAP3. He had trouble articulating even how students of color, particularly Black and Brown students, might be affected by recent Black Lives Marches in their detracked classes. "We're a pretty open school, meaning open minded and fair and equitable," he asserted. "I'm going to be honest with you, when I go into a classroom and observe and I see three Black kids sitting in the back of the room together, I have a problem with that and I'll let the teacher know that." To that end, most of the coding had to do with my own skepticism of neutrality at the school.

CRT	
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism

Figure 31: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP D3 interview

### AP D4

Per usual, Critical Race Theory provided the fewest number of codes. Like most of the white educators with whom I spoke, Critical Race Theory did not play as much of a role in my coding structure with DAP4. She did note that students of color seem to take advanced courses at a smaller rate than white students but she did not specific beyond "minority students." She also did not note many proactive measures being taken by the administration besides a few meetings. "Issues of racial equity, when we feel that there are gaps, whether it's racial equity, or whether it's underclassmen just needing a way to get used to the building, we try and come up with action groups, committees, clubs, ways to connect kids, ways to offer them resources," she said, "so I feel like administration is behind a lot of those initiatives. And then we try and bring more kids and faculty and staff into those, to grow them, to develop them. We kind of plant the seeds, nurture it, and then hope, work with others to help continue to lift it off the ground."



Figure 32: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in AP D4 interview

### Principal D

Similar to other framework coding experiences during this project, Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. Although Principal D spoke more about race and racism as a factor in tracking students more than other interviewees, Critical Race Theory still provided the fewest number of codes within the framework coding rounds. Within those codes, the permanence of racism and the phenomenon of erasing race were most prevalent (see Figure 7). In one exchange, Principal D asked "How do you talk about white privilege without offending 80% of your class?" I thought this represented a surprising stance given that in other areas he was very comfortable discussing helping students sit with their discomfort. Although they are a small part of the population at School D, centering Black and Brown students' experiences could help the school to overcome some of the persistent challenges faced in terms of community support for the detracking program.

Principal D also shared some evidence that suggests the detracking program is in some ways a result of interest convergence between wealthy, white parents and students of color. In some ways, he seems to cater to these dominant parents. "We've always had parent sessions and parent nights, but making this clear, and looking at the evidence and some of the research that, in other words, this isn't an experiment, we know this works, and making that manifest and clear," he said.

CRT		
permanence of racism	skepticism of neutrality	interest convergence
erasing race		

Figure 33: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Principal D interview

# Math D

Similar to other framework coding experiences during this project, Critical Race Theory provided the smallest coding structure. Although she seemed very invested in her students' success, Math Chair D did seem to have a few blind spots when it came to race and racism at her school. "The first year that I was there, a lot of the African-American students made a concerted decision, a decision together that they were not going to buy into the philosophy of the school. They didn't do a sport. There was not one black kid on the basketball team. Yes. That blew me away." She also seemed to exhibit a degree of color blindness in terms of what minoritized students may experience at a school that is so full of white children. These pieces of our conversation led me to note the permanence of racism and how race gets erased. Math Chair D did share, however, how lower-level classes had been mostly full of minoritized students, and that realization led to the detracking process. "My IB class, I had not one person of color in there, and that was for two years that I was there," she said. "And then when I came back it was different and it was good."

CRT	
permanence of racism	Interest convergence
	ensing rave

Figure 34: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Math D interview

Science D

There were no codes relating to Critical Race Theory in this interview. Race did not come up at all during my conversation with Science Chair D. This oversight is quite meaningful in a school with 20% of the student population identifying as members of minoritized race. This oversight also leads me wonder even more deeply what is happening to students of color within detracked classes.

#### Social Studies D

Critical Race Theory was in last place in terms of framework coding this interview. As with many other white educators in this study, Social Studies Chair D did not engage in much explicit discussion about student race and how students' races affect their experiences or educational opportunities in the detracking program. She did allude to the fact that minoritized students do tend to make up the bulk of students who opt out of the IB humanities track in eleventh and twelfth grade, thus illustrated the permanence of racism.

"Although 11th grade [is] detracked," she said "what happened is those kids who normally wouldn't have been tracked into an IB class ended up detracking at the end of 11th grade or rather retracking at the end of 11th grade and going back into a more traditional contemporary issues." She noted that these classes tend to be "primarily populated by children of color, special ed students and white students who were underachieving, or maybe not even underachieving. Just achieving at different levels or had different motivations."



Figure 35: Treemap of Critical Race Theory coding in Social Studies D interview

# Summary

Critical Race Theory provided the least number of framework codes in seventeen out of twenty of the participant interviews. In the remaining three, CRT came in fourth place twice and third place once. This finding was quite surprising in that all of the schools were racially heterogeneous is some way. In initial planning, I had assumed that CRT would play a much larger role in understanding the links between school leadership and student outcomes in detracking programs. This finding suggests that school leaders, particularly white school leaders, need tools to help them talk more explicitly about race so that they can in turn address how race and racism may affect their students.

CRT			
skepticism of neutrality	permanence of racism	erasing race	Interest convergence

Figure 36: Critical Race Theory coding across all participant interviews

### **Opportunity to Learn**

Carroll (1989) first introduced the concept of OTL as a relationship between the time needed to learn content and the time students spend learning that content. Schmidt, Cogan, Houang, and McKnight (2011) advanced a "definition of OTL as content" because "the profession of content is the fundamental rationale of schooling and the education system," and "this is an aspect of schooling that both reflects education policy and is amenable to education police reform" (p. 400).

**OTL and student organization.** Differences in OTL among tracked groups of students may account for some of the differences in outcomes for these students. Barnard-Brak, Lan, & Yang (2018) found that even students who had similar test scores yet had lower OTL were less likely to answer mathematics questions correctly than students with higher OTL. According to Arnold-Berkovits, Kurz, & Reddy (2019), time spent on instruction correlated with higher test scores.

**OTL and minoritized students.** OTL differences can be particularly acute in terms of outcomes for students who lack access to cultural capital. Schmidt et al. (2015) found not only is there a positive relationship between student socioeconomic status and OTL but nearly one-third

of the SES relationship to reading achievement is due to the association between SES and OTL. Drawing on the foregrounded perspectives and Sorensen's organizational theory, OTL adds an important dimension to researching how school leaders can best act in terms of detracking.

# Principal A

Opportunity to Learn was a close second in terms of framework codes. During the coding of Principal A's interview, student organization played a large role in understanding the detracking program at the school (see figure 4). Principal A described organizing students into smaller tracks in several disciplines. Students are organized together not only in English 9, as described above, but also in biology honors and Algebra I without a separate pre-algebra track that had existed in the past. With these changes, students have access to the same opportunities to learn regardless of oppression they may experience because of their socioeconomic or racial backgrounds.

Concerns about the opportunity to learn for minoritized students appeared less often. Principal A did note that about 50% of Latino students (the largest minoritized subgroup at the school) were taking part in IB classes. He also offered, however, that "it's like a brown bag test as far as who's in those classes by and large" in regards to opening up the IB program.



Figure 37: Treemap of opportunity to learn coding in Principal A interview

# Counselor B

Opportunity to Learn provided the dominant source of coding. Counseling Chair B saw OTL primarily within the function of student organization based on several elective courses that drove the master schedule and made it difficult to achieve true detracking. "And even as we attempted to truly detrack," he said, "there's still things like orchestra and certain classes that tend to lend themselves to kids with opportunities. Such that, even if we're not trying to track, the same level of kid ends up in a certain period of honors earth science."



Figure 38: Treemap of Opportunity Learn coding in Counselor B interview

# English B

Opportunity to Learn provided the third largest source of framework codes in this interview. Student organization played a large role in this round of coding (see Figure 5). English Teacher B spent a great deal of time discussing how students are organized via test scores and teacher recommendations. She also discussed how previously students in different levels of a class have taken different end-of-year standardized tests. For the students in the lower-level class, that test was the Work Keys. Students in the honors-level class took the state test. This differentiation in assessment made it impossible to have the same academic expectations for students. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, however, all students will take the state standardized test.



Figure 39: Treemap of opportunity to learn coding in English B coding

# AP B1

Opportunity to Learn and Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation tying for third place in coding this interview. AP B1 saw OTL particularly in terms of minoritized students who had previously been denied the same OTL as students from dominant groups. She saw this happening especially to students who lacked the home infrastructure to support them with nightly homework. "Okay, which also happens to be our black and brown boys, they don't do homework," she said. "Then it starts, what's the value of homework? That's great. They just might not have a mom that can sit down with them for two hours and do their homework for them. You actually have a better idea of what this kid can do than the kid that has a parent that's basically doing their homework for them. You know, I think that also goes into biases and just how we view family and those outside of school factors."



Figure 40: Treemap of Opportunity Learn coding in AP B1 coding

# AP B2

In this round of interview coding, Critical Race Theory and Opportunity to Learn tied for fourth place. Our conversation related to OTL centered mostly around marginalized students and how their opportunities have increased under the detracking program. He also discussed how some teachers continue to have biases against minoritized students when they are placed in honors-for-all courses. "Like a lot of biases," he said, "they come in a lot of different forms and they're a lot more refined now than they used to be than just someone coming out and saying, 'I don't want to teach those kids, or I don't want to teach Black kids or Brown kids, or dumb kids, or poor kids.""



Figure 41: Treemap of Opportunity Learn coding in AP B2 coding

# Instructional Coach B

Opportunity to Learn was in third place in the framework coding for this interview.

Instructional Coach B saw the ways in which students are organized at School B directly related

to the ways in which those students are minoritized. She expressed a great deal of concern that students of color are allowed to drop advanced courses too easily compared to white students. "Most of our AP classes have opened up where if you look on the surface, enrollment in AP classes is more heterogeneous demographically in terms of race, in terms of gender," she said. "I would even say even somewhat socioeconomically. That's only one metric. How many of those students in the fall are enrolled in those classes and how many of those students stay in those classes in the spring?"



Figure 42: Opportunity to Learn treemap in Instructional Coach B coding

### Principal B

Opportunity to Learn was in fourth place in the framework coding for this interview. Opportunity to learn manifests at School B primarily through student organization. Principal B has approached detracking through a "leveling up" mindset, which means that most ninth and tenth grade students are placed in an honors course in the core subjects of math, science, social studies, and English. All ninth and tenth grade students do have access to honors-level curriculum in these core subjects either through the honors for all program or the honors-option English course. "Why are we giving students the option for that when as teachers and educators we should be teaching there and scaffolding up and allowing them the success?" Principal B asked at a leadership team meeting. "I went into that initial meeting with the intent of just selling honors option to all those teachers. But an hour and a half later were really frank conversations and just input from everyone. We ended up with no, let's go full force with leveled up and let's make it consistent among typically ninth grade classes, those entry level classes, really the springboard for most of your high school trajectory."



Figure 43: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Principal B interview

#### Math B

Opportunity to Learn provided the second largest source of framework codes in this interview. Our opportunity to learn discussion focused mainly on student organization. Math Chair B noted how tracking in math often begins early in a student's elementary school experience. She felt that for detracking to work at the high school level, students need greater opportunity to learn at the elementary school level. In this school district, that desire has been met with some pushback from parents and other community members, according to Math Chair B. "When I came to [Community B], it was very different and very obviously grouped into these different hierarchies," she said. "And since day one, since I've come here, I've felt like it's a problem, that I feel like stems from the lower grade levels. And so, since I have become Department Chair, and since [District Math Coordinator] kind of took over in terms of the division, I've really tried to push for, as far back as we can go, trying to start unlevelling those things. But really didn't get any buy-in, or support for that."

While minoritized students were also part of the discussion, Math Chair B focused primarily on student minoritized because of their disabilities. As mentioned above, she discussed the importance of including all students in geometry honors along with the hard and important work of collaborative special education teachers. "We were very fortunate to have a really strong collab teacher," she said, "who really tried to provide in our PLCs a real voice for those kids, and scaffolding, and things like that."



Figure 44: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Math B interview

#### Science B

Opportunity to Learn provided the third largest source of framework codes in this interview. During Science Chair B's interview coding, student organization played a large role in understanding the detracking program in her department (see Figure 5). She described several different paths that students could take in science that were mostly dependent on their math classes. Biology was the sole exception to this rule. A handful of students who failed science in eighth grade were placed in a special environmental sciences class "where they can play science school a year longer and get them ready for an honors biology class."

Concerns about opportunities to learn for minoritized students were minimized. Other than special education students and students learning English, minoritized students were not mentioned during our discussion at all. This lack leads me to believe I may need to tweak my interview protocol in order to make these discussions more explicit. My previous relationship with the school may have also colored this conversation.



Figure 45: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Science B interview

#### Social Studies B

Opportunity to Learn provided the second smallest source of framework codes in this interview. Discussions of opportunity to learn with Social Studies Chair B focused primarily on how students are organized now and have been in the past. In terms of higher-level classes in the social studies department, the main requirement is a teacher recommendation. Social Studies Chair B was quick to note, however, that those recommendations are "not fixed in stone" but students "have the ability to craft a deal with their teacher, here are the things that I would need to see to go up a level. But there are no formal requirements." Given the on-going White-heavy demographics of higher-level courses, even this informal requirement is likely to be impacting students' opportunities to learn.

Figure 46: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Social Studies B interview *Principal C* 

OTL

Student organization

Opportunity to Learn provided the third greatest number of framework codes in this interview analysis. Because so many levels persist at School C, student organization and their opportunity to learn is of a paramount concern. Although Principal C did not articulate the clear differences in opportunity to learn between tracking, he did note "CCP to AP would be a big jump, but we've had many go from Honors to AP. That's a cultural thing, I think. Our teachers definitely subscribe to if a kid is really accelerating you don't want to hold them back. You want to challenge them...That's been our philosophy."

Minoritized st...



Figure 47: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Principal C interview *English D* 

Opportunity to Learn provided the third greatest number of framework codes in this interview analysis. At School D, student organization plays a big role in students' opportunity to learn because students largely have similar opportunities regardless of their minoritized status. In 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade humanities courses, for example, all students are in a pre-IB course while, as mentioned previously, Regents and IB students learn together in the same classroom in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade humanities. English Teacher D summed up the ethos of the program when he said "I don't think teacher recommendations are very valid or reliable. Parents, even less so. So I just don't think we're good at figuring out who should be in which track to begin with. I think we sometimes become distracted by compliance, or behavior, or effort instead of aptitude."



Figure 48: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in English D interview

**AP D1** 

Opportunity Learn provided the fourth most conceptual codes. During my discussion with School D AP1, student organization into courses was at the forefront of OTL discussions. She focused on Principal D's unwavering support. "He was one of the initial advocates for it," she said. "He...fully believes that it's something important for all kids." She did note that this type of student organization can cause difficulties for teachers. "I do think though that we all realize that it's sometimes difficult for teachers," she said. "The teachers have been trained to differentiate instruction within the classroom and then the support that we make available to kids who may struggle, we do have extra supports set up for them." Notably, discussion about minoritized students' opportunity to learn focused primarily on students with special education needs.

OTL	
Student organization	Minoritized students

Figure 49: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in AP D1 interview

**AP D2** 

Opportunity Learn provided the fourth most conceptual codes. According to DAP2, students at school D are given remarkably similar opportunities to learn because of the nature of the IB-for-all program. Within the program, students have options for support or enrichment, such as with the chemistry course. DAP2 explained that the chemistry students are all together with students receiving advanced enrichment or supports on alternative days as needed. "On both ends," he noted, "you have supports for the kids that struggle and that need that additional resource and you also implement opportunities for enrichment for your top level kids. I mean, it's the basis of differentiation." What's not clear, however, is if students may move between the enrichment or support as a particular part of the content challenges or is too easy for them.



Figure 50: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in AP D2

# **AP D3**

Opportunity to Learn provided the fourth greatest number of framework codes. DAP3 spoke most often about students minoritized in terms of their disability status. Although these students have access to higher-level courses, two emerging tracks also inhibit them to some degree. Key to understanding this student organization will be knowing how many students make up those tracks and how many students with disabilities are tracked into the larger IB-for-all program. I am also curious to know what sort of disabilities students have in which tracks.



Figure 51: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in AP D3

# **AP D4**

Opportunity to Learn providing the fourth greatest number of framework codes. DAP4 focused a great deal on how students are organized, particularly because of the unique pre-IB program that includes virtually all students, including many students with special needs. She noted several central questions to this organizational work. "How can we adapt, adjust, scaffold? What can you do in your position as a special educator to help kids achieve, and to think outside the box, and to provide the supports necessary?" So, some of those have been built into the system, but it's also kind of a cheerleading and coaching of the teachers to keep in mind that we really believe that this is worthwhile and beneficial, and no one's looking to torment kids or make them cry in their pillows. That it is how can we find the strategies and tools that will help kids access more, understand better, you know?



Figure 52: Treemap of opportunity to learn coding in AP D4 interview

### Principal D

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Opportunity to Learn provided the exact same amount of codes and tied for third place. Similar to previous interviews, discussions of opportunity to learn with Principal D focused primarily on how students are organized now and have been in the past. In addition to the open-IB model, he also discussed how co-seating Regents and IB courses has increased the opportunity to learn for both minoritized students and students from the dominant culture at School D. In English this year, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade class were "heterogenous and co-seated," according to Principal D. "So the student in 11th grade is asked when they register, are you going to sit the IB exam at the end of two years or are you taking Regents?" he explained. "So they're in the same heterogeneous classroom. And a curriculum was written, this is only the second year that we've done it, where when the curriculum adapts intensive units that exceed the New York State standards and adapt the IB standards for a written task for an oral presentation, the instruction is differentiated as are the assessments so that the student with the Regents standard is completing an analogous assessment written assignment, but based on the Regents' standards, not the IB standards." Principal D was also clear on what detracking is not. He made certain to discuss both the practicalities of detracking as well as the necessity of inclusivity in order to increase students' opportunity to learn. "Detracking does not mean that you wake up one day and eliminate the tracks that you now have and funnel all the students in towards one class," he said. "That's not what detracking is in a practical sense. What detracking is, is taking a look at the tracks that you do have, looking at the areas of strength and weakness in each, and consolidating towards a cohesive curriculum that still addresses the needs of all students, but also affords them the opportunity to learn in a more inclusive environment rather than a series of echo chambers."

OTL		
Student organization	Minoritized students	

Figure 53: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Principal D interview

#### Math D

Opportunity to Learn provided the second most codes in framework coding this interview. I was surprised because OTL does not usually play such a large role in framework coding, but Math Chair D spoke at length about how students are organized at the school, particularly in terms of the support and enrichment courses offered to students. If students struggle in math after the first marking period, they must take a support course. Conversely,
students may also sign up for an enrichment course that supplements their math course. While this course is often helpful to have in the next math sequence, it is not required or necessary, according to Math Chair D. "Some kids start in support class because they needed it the year before, she said. "And then they find out, oh, I'm doing really well in here. I don't think I need that. And they can drop it. So it's flowing. Usually you'll find out after midterms, right after the Regents exams that kids will then want to sign up for support because they're getting nervous."



Figure 54: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Math D interview

#### Science D

Opportunity to Learn made up the third great number of framework codes. Science Chair D focused completely on student organization. Minoritized students did not come up in our discussion at all, which was a large oversight is a school with 20% of the student population identifying as members of minoritized race. In terms of student organization, he discussed how prerequisites were not really enforced at the school. "It's more suggestion," he said. "It's not contingent upon, it's more, 'Hey. There's a better chance to be more successful.""



Figure 55: Opportunity to learn treemap in Science D interview

### Social Studies D

Opportunity to Learn made up the fourth greatest number of framework codes. At School D in general and in the social studies department specifically, opportunity to learn is embedded particularly in the pre-IB humanities courses nearly all students take in ninth and tenth grade. Social Studies Chair D, however, did not seem them as particularly distinct from how she might be teaching irrespective of the IB program.

"It's really funny," she noted. "In 9th grade it's called 9th grade honors, and I'm just speaking of history and 10th grade honors, which is really bizarre because there's only one 9th grade course you can take and there's only one 10th grade course you can take. I don't understand why it's framed as an honors course. It's not. It's just a traditional course, but I think when it comes to perceptions, it gives kids a perception of a level of excellence. And I think communitywise it affirms community perceptions about their children and where they are and their academic abilities, et cetera. And that 9th grade honors identification it might be state-mandated. I'm not sure. I remember first encountering it and thinking, "This is really semantics but important semantics because of how it frames community understanding of their child's abilities,

right?"

OTL		
Student organization	Minoritized students	

Figure 56: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding in Social Studies D interview

## Summary

Opportunity to learn was neither an underwhelming or overwhelming source of coding throughout each of these interviews. In most interviews, OTL was in the middle of the pack. Within the coding, participants mostly discussed student organization. This finding makes sense when considering that all of these schools are continually reorganizing to maximize students' opportunity to learn by providing more students with advanced courses. Similar to the discussion on Critical Race Theory, explicit discussion of minoritized students was difficult or nonexistent for most white educators.



Figure 57: Treemap of Opportunity to Learn coding across all interview participants

## Sorensen's Theory of Organizational Differentiation

Sorensen's framework for "organizational differentiation" (1970) names four dimensions for evaluating how students are organized into tracked classes: scope, electivity, selectivity, and inclusivity. By using these dimensions to understand how school leaders are acting related to detracking, this framework can inform both qualitative data collection and the development of a quantitative instrument. Despite the age of this framework, several recent studies have continued to demonstrate Sorensen's contemporary currency. For example, Kelly (Kelly & Price, 2011) used the framework to explain tracking at work throughout the state of North Carolina.

## Principal A

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the dominant source of coding. Principal A reported seeing decreasing selectivity as key to detracking's success because the "function that [detracking] serves is to broaden access for students by limiting the number of discrete pathways and opening access to the most rigorous courses."

He and his faculty undertook this decreasing selectivity by working toward honors for all classes, first in English. "We said, okay, well, if we're really going to teach these things the same, the way that we're going to do it is we're going to make every class an honors class," Principal A noted.

In Sorensen's organizational differentiation framework there are two important questions about the inclusivity of a tracking program (Sorensen, 1970): 1) What are the demographics of the highest levels of courses (Kelly, 2007), and 2) what future options do students have for coursework once in a particular track (Gamoran, 1992)?

Principal A has considered carefully the on-going answer to question one. "We looked at those first two tracks, said, well, why do we basically decide in ninth grade that these kids are bound for IB and these kids aren't? Oh, and by the way, it's like a brown bag test as far as who's in those classes by and large."

The faculty at school A have also worked to keep options open for students from their earliest classes, but not all students agree. "Kids still see IB diploma program is for rich white kids," Principal A said. "The perception changes, I think for [the faculty], we're looking at the data, we're doing this work, we're talking about our action items in our school plan for the kids who are just living, and it doesn't really look that way. Also, they weren't here five years ago."



Figure 58: Treemap of organizational differentiation coding in Principal A interview

## Counselor B

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation was just behind Bourdieu in third place. In terms of selectivity, School B seemed to be erecting barriers to advanced classes even as they create honors-for-most courses. In order to get into AP courses, one must be recommended by a teacher. "And if you didn't get the recommendation you were looking for, you could petition the teacher and gain an opportunity to improve your performance starting in January," Counseling B Chair said. "So if you were not given the recommendation of AP you could say, 'I'd like to be recommended for AP.' And the teacher would say, 'This is what you have to do in order to earn that."" This practice was discontinued because of COVID-19, but Counseling Chair B thought it would continue when the pandemic effects ended at the school.

Inclusivity was, like OTL, largely driven by Counselor B's discussion of how elective courses affected the organization of students into classes, even if they were nominally honorsfor-all. "And there were mixed results depending on the class, the teacher, the combination of students in a given class," he noted. "And even as we attempted to truly detrack, there's still things like orchestra and certain classes that tend to lend themselves to kids with opportunities."

Sorensen		
Selectivity	Inclusivity	Scope
		Floridity
		HESTING

Figure 60: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Counselor B interview

English B

Sorensen's theory of organizational differentiation provided the second greatest framework codes. Selectivity has fluctuated at this school in the English department. For a brief time, all students were in what was deemed "unleveled"—an honors-option course that was completely detracked. Following pushback from parents discussed above, students are now broken into two tracks: English 9 and English 9 honors. English 9 honors does tend to include more students from different demographics than previous tracking attempts. Many years ago, the chair pointed out, the school had five separate tracks for ninth graders in English.



Figure 61: Treemap of organizational differentiation coding in English B interview

## AP B1

Opportunity to Learn and Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation tied for third place. Assistant Principal B1 saw inclusivity both in terms of students with special needs and students who had been racially oppressed. She noted several instances where students were discriminated against based on their perceived abilities or even their race. In addition to the homework and behavior examples she gave above, AP B1 also noted the support the school received at the district level. "I think we were kind of primed to do [detracking]," she said. "I don't know if I realized that we probably had fewer obstacles, in terms of just saying, 'This is what we're doing,' than maybe some other divisions might [because] I just feel like the conversations that our division was having about equity, inclusion, and our performance of black and brown students."



Figure 62: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in AP B1 interview

# AP B2

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the second greatest number of framework codes. BAP2 saw both inclusivity and selectivity at work as more students of color had an opportunity to enroll in higher-level classes. He also had a different experience that other white educators had shared about families of marginalized parents resisting leveling up. "There are people that say it's a good idea," he said. "Well, obviously the students who are trying to break the barriers, their families are all for it."

Sorensen		
Inclusivity	Selectivity	Scope



## Instructional Coach B

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the least number of codes. Instructional Coach B spoke less about organizational differentiation than other participants. This makes sense she has the least to do with organizing students. She did speak a bit to the role both inclusivity and electivity played as she saw students having more choices in the detracking program to move into advanced classes. She noted, particularly, how the principal supported and championed the detracking program at School B. "I think he wants to convey that all of our classes are for all of our students if they have a passion, interest, and the ability to be in those classes and succeed and work hard." she said. "I think to our staff, additionally, he is saying we need to make sure we're supporting some of them so that they're successful, because these labels are fairly arbitrary except for in some instances when we're talking about designating college courses, things like that. But we want to make sure that we have space for all of those students who we really feel are ready for that experience."



Figure 64: Sorensen's Organizational Differentiation treemap in Instructional Coach B interview *Principal B* 

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided roughly a quarter of the codes Culturally Responsive School Leadership and was in second place in terms of amount of codes used. Because School B is in the process of creating only one level for each of the core

courses in ninth grade, selectivity was a hot topic of conversation for Principal B. School B has not yet achieved this goal, however, with an Advanced Placement World Geography course available to ninth graders in addition to World Geography I honors. While racial inclusivity also came up during our conversation, how best to include students with special needs made up the bulk of concern for Principal B. In English, for example, students with extremely low reading scores are placed in an honors-option course rather than the English 9 honors course with the rest of their classmates. How best to include students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) is an on-going concern at School B.



Figure 65: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation Coding in Principal B interview

#### Math B

Sorensen provided the third most codes in this interview analysis. Selectivity's role in our discussion centered around the unlevelling happening in geometry with honors for all. Math Chair B did note, however, that many students come to School B haven already taken geometry. The various ages of students in the courses can also communicate students' respective math backgrounds to students. There also seems to be no discussed of unlevelling the upper-level math classes that are split into honors and academic.

Inclusivity concerns the demographics of students in particular levels (Sorensen, 1970). Once again, these discussions focused primarily on students with special needs rather than discussions of students' racial demographics in particular classes. Perhaps because of the nascent nature of detracking in this department at this school, the effects of racially diversifying upperlevel classes have yet to be felt.



Figure 66: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Math B interview

### Science B

Sorensen's organizational differentiation theory provided the second most codes in this interview analysis. Science Teacher B spoke particularly to the benefit of including special education students in previously tracked classes. "My own child is a SpEd kid," she shared. "He's dyslexic. So he would be in the boat where he would never have an opportunity to take an honors level class because nothing's collab in the honors level." She also noted that students with IEPs and other special learning needs can both receive extra support and be challenged "[They] just need extra support with reading or whatever, and that would allow all these SpEd kids to open up another door that in the past they had never got a chance to, which I think was awesome."



Figure 67: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Science B interview *Social Studies B* 

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provide the third most codes. Because School B is in the process of creating only one level for each of the core courses in ninth grade, selectivity was a hot topic of conversation for Social Studies Chair B. School B has not yet achieved this goal, however, with an Advanced Placement World Geography course available to ninth graders in addition to World Geography I honors in the social studies department.

Social Studies Chair B was particularly interested in what the designation of honors means at this particular school. He noted that the school lacked a common definition for honors. He also expressed concern about inclusivity in terms of making sure that students with special educational needs were able to access the curriculum. These students also made up the entirety of the discussion about electivity.



Figure 68: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Social Studies B interview *Principal C* 

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the dominant source of coding. Because the detracking movement at school C is so nascent, selectivity came up quite a bit in our discussion. The school currently has the following levels: Advanced Placement, Honors, College and Career Prep, and Direct Instruction for students who have special needs. Their main focus on detracking has been to remove an Accelerated Honors level in most subjects although there are a few examples left in the master schedule when an Advanced Placement course is not available as the highest option. "By doing so," Principal C noted, "kids are electing, if they have that choice of taking Honors as opposed to AP, they would lean towards taking AP, so we're seeing more kids choosing the AP. As a result, we had more test takers this year than we've ever had in the past. It's grown, probably more than double, over the last five years or so." In the quantitative phase, I will check this assertion with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.



Figure 69: Treemap of organizational differentiation coding in Principal C interview

#### English D

Sorensen's organizational theory was second in terms of providing framework codes. Selectivity matters a little less at School D than it typically may at other schools because students are by and large in the same classrooms and levels. According to English Chair D, selectivity does come into play in the math department and in the decisions students must make between IB and Regents seating in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade humanities.

"The nice thing is there's no one who is necessarily labeled in a way that makes it obvious that they somehow shouldn't be in the room, English Chair D said. "Whereas we might talk about Regents kids in an IB class. That's about as far as the label goes. It's well understood that that decision to be a Regents kid in an IB class is made by the student ostensibly. There are influences by perhaps guidance or parents. But no one has prevented the student from taking the IB course."

The teacher also noted that poor students and students of color make up a larger percentage of the Regents track. "I think poor students probably are at a disadvantage," he said. "As I said, whether it's causal or observed, hard for me to say. But the IB does require a good amount of preparation, and so there needs to be some sort of structured understanding of that at home. If a student is not prepared for class, that becomes a barrier. It's hard, again, for me to determine just why that would be." Finally, the teacher noted the principal's strong support of students starting the year in the Regents program, even if it means a lower percentage of IB diplomas attempted versus those gained. "I think he much prefers when they err on the side of trying it and changing their minds afterward, then regretting not having tried it," the chair said. "He is a big proponent of the IB for All model. Which, I think to be fair to him, is not helpful as far as his numbers go, to have all of these students try it and not necessarily get the diploma. But he's been, I think, very good about making sure everyone at least gives it a shot."



Figure 70: Treemap of organizational differentiation coding in English D interview

### **AP D1**

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation and Culturally Responsive School Leadership provided nearly the same amount of codes as they tied for second place in this interview analysis. Selectivity is particularly salient at School D because in most disciplines, there is only one level of course. In 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, all students are in pre-IB courses and a math track that leads to calculus preparedness for twelfth grade. Even when multiple courses are offered, they are typically co-seated. These arrangements also lead to more inclusive courses with demographics reflecting the demographics of the school.

Sorensen		
Selectivity	inclusivity	
	Seone	

Figure 71: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in AP D1 interview

# **AP D2**

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the third greatest number of codes in analysis of this interview. Inclusivity functions at School D largely because of the pre-IB-for-all program in ninth and tenth grades. Even after these initial years, students are largely placed in class together even when they are technically in different levels of a subject. AP D2 was particularly proud of the inclusivity fostered in AP Calculus. "We have push-ins into classes like AP calculus," he said. "I mean, in most schools, an AP calculus class contains the top five to 10% of the grade and there certainly are not any support teachers in there."

Selectivity concerns the number of levels of courses offered in each department. Sorensen measures selectivity as an effort to have the "proper" type of student in each course. This dimension analyzes sorting as a means to create levels to match perceived student ability. Understanding selectivity can be helpful in understanding educators' resistance (LeBlanc, 2014) or embrace (Godley, Monroe, & Castma, 2015) of detracking. Selectivity at School D is also largely driven by the IB-for-all model because all students are encouraged to see themselves as belonging the highest courses available. At School D "the way that students are grouped is irrespective of prior performance and is more a better indication of just the heterogeneous or heterogeneity of the school," DAP2 said.



Figure 72: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in AP D2 interview *AP D3* 

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the fourth most conceptual codes. ). Inclusivity functions at School D largely because of the pre-IB-for-all program in ninth and tenth grades. DAP3 was particularly proud of the inclusion model at work for students with special needs in the detracking program. According to him, "it's very normal to have two teachers in the room, so you have a second teacher or a teaching assistant, two adults. One is in front of the room and the other is helping kids, and that's seen as everyday. It's not questioned, it's not even thought about. You probably wouldn't tell, and you correct me if I'm wrong, because if you pushed into inclusion classes the only way you would know the difference is if there was a second adult in that room, otherwise you wouldn't be able to tell." Most courses at School D are offered only at one level. However, DAP3 shone light on some of the pathways for students with special needs who may not fit within the traditional IBfor-all model. "That's where we do have Down Syndrome kids, in the CORE Program, that's a little bit different. That's Life Skills. They do push into electives, mainstream electives, so they are with other kids in other rooms. It's not entirely self-contained. It's also a vocational program. The next less-restrictive is our Pathways Program, which is one year old, this past year."



Figure 73: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in AP D3 interview

#### AP D4

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the third most codes. At School D, inclusivity functions in that all students are invited into the IB program and given supports to help them be successful. DAP4 defines student success on these terms very broadly. "I think I define success as kids being motivated to learn," she said, "and to move beyond, to progress from their current position, status, whatever word you want to use. So, whether that was a kid who was failing, who's now getting high 60s and a 70, that to me is as important as an 80 student who now jumped up to high 90s." This attitude lends itself to a more inclusive environment in the IB program, although it is far from perfect. "I do notice we don't have as many minority students, at least percentage wise, taking as many say IB or AP courses," she said.



Figure 74: Treemap of organizational differentiation theory coding in AP D4 interview

## Principal D

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provide the second most codes. Because School D is focused on maintaining as few levels as possible, selectivity was a hot topic of conversation for Principal D. In the humanities, School D places all students in pre-IB English and social studies courses in ninth and tenth grade, thus decreasing the selectivity of their program. In eleventh and twelfth grade English students opting for an IB or Regents diploma are co-seated. This is also the case in eleventh grade history. In twelfth grade, however, Regents students take an elective social studies course. Math and science provide for more selectivity and inclusivity at School D. Principal D did assert that 80% of students take either AP or Regents physics.



Figure 75: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Principal D interview *Math D* 

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the third most framework codes in this interview analysis. Math Chair D asserted that the courses were much more demographically diverse than before detracking took place. Math Chair D was also notably focused on electivity, the element of true student choice within a tracking system. Students within the math department do have a number of choices after tenth grade. They can take a sequence of AP or IB math courses. There are also levels within the IB math course, but that is a new addition for the 2020-2021 school year.



Figure 76: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Math D interview

## Science D

Sorensen's framework for organizational differentiation provided the second greatest number of framework codes in this interview analysis. Science Chair B noted that the detracking program enhanced both selectivity and electivity for students in the science department." I think a lot of times you would lose kids in that marathon [science] stretch in a lot of different ways," he said, "just in terms of denying kids that otherwise may be interested in a subject or does not have access. And it ignores, obviously, a lot of different things, but just in terms of a lot of kids maybe just have a bad connection to a teacher or they're having a bad year."



Figure 77: Sorensen's organizational differentiation treemap in Science D interview

## Social Studies D

Sorensen's organizational theory was second in terms of framework codes in this interview analysis. Selectivity matters a little less at School D than it typically may at other schools because students are by and large in the same classrooms and levels, but the detracking program was not without concerns. "I have to say I was hesitant and critical of the plan and the roll-out because I think the success of it really depends on what your goals are," Social Studies Chair D said. "So I think we've had IB for all for history for probably six years. Maybe a little more. And I think it's been contentious, especially among special ed population, children of color, as far as how successful it is."



Figure 78: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding in Social Studies Chair D interview *Summary* 

Sorensen's framework for "organizational differentiation" (1970) names four dimensions for evaluating how students are organized into tracked classes: scope, electivity, selectivity, and inclusivity. By using these dimensions to understand how school leaders are acting related to detracking, this framework informed my understanding of detracking work at these schools. Inclusivity and selectivity played the two biggest roles in this round of data coding.

In Sorensen's framework (1970), inclusivity encompasses the demographics of students in particular levels as well as their future options as a result of that leveling. Inclusivity played a role in these schools largely as the impetus for detracking. School leaders expressed discomfort at being able to identify a course level based on the racial make up the students within a classroom.

Selectivity concerns the number of levels of courses offered in each department. Sorensen measures selectivity as an effort to have the "proper" type of student in each course. This dimension analyzes sorting as a means to create levels to match perceived student ability. Understanding inclusivity and selectivity can be helpful in understanding educators' resistance (LeBlanc, 2014) or embrace (Godley, Monroe, & Castma, 2015) of detracking. Selectivity played a role in these schools' detracking programs as school leaders worked to expand the idea of who is a "proper" student to have in an advanced course. Student choice and the scope of tracking played less of a role, I think, because, with one exception, school leaders were focused on getting as many students into higher level courses as possible.



Figure 79: Treemap of Organizational Differentiation coding across all interviews